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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this collection of eight essays is to demonstrate some of the ways in which the culture of British colleges of further education are being consciously changed to meet the demands of the 21st century. The essays are: (1) "Change Where Contrasting Cultures Meet," (Will Bridge) which examines the experiences of South Thames College; (2) "Constructing Capability," (Ruth Silver) which focuses on the development of student and staff charters at Lewisham College; (3) "Changing College Culture," (Tony Henry) which discusses college management and leadership in reference to the experiences of East Birmingham College; (4) "Inspiring a Shared Vision," (Ann Limb) which addresses the role of leadership and the promotion of learning at Milton Keynes College; (5) "A Vision and Culture for the Future," (Richard Gorringe) which sets out the vision of Norton Radstock College; (6) "Culture Change: A Personal View," (Ken Ruddiman) an examination of the nature of cultural change by the chief executive of Sheffield College; (7) "Re-Engineering the Culture of a College," (Nick Lewis) which describes the management process and reorganization of Broxtowe College; and (8) "Incorporation of the City of Bath College," (Justin Togher) which describes the effects of incorporation on the administration and staff of the City of Bath College. (MDM)

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The Staff College

Changing the culture of a college

by Richard Gorringe, Will Bridge, Ruth Silver, Tony Henry, Ann Limb, Ken Ruddiman, Nick Lewis and Justin Togher

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Coombe Lodge Report

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Changing the culture of a college

by Richard Gorringe, Will Bridge, Ruth Silver, Tony Henry, Ann Limb, Ken Ruddiman, Nick Lewis and Justin Togher

Editors: Richard Gorringe and Pippa Toogood

Coombe Lodge Report
Volume 24 Number 3

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Changing the culture of a college

by Richard Gorringe and other contributors

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Foreword

Richard Gorringe
Director
Norton Radstock College

ORIGINS OF THIS BOOK

The purpose of this Coombe Lodge Report is quite simple: to demonstrate some of the ways in which the culture of the British college of further education is being consciously changed to meet the demands of the 21st century. It is not primarily concerned with theories of management, although each author represented has clear theoretical underpinnings. It is about ways in which things are happening now in colleges.

The idea for the book arose from a sense I had that, while many publications deal with good practice in colleges in managing resources, people, the curriculum, etc., none explains how the ways people think and act can be consistently influenced through the creation and development of an institutional culture. There are many apocryphal stories about how particular principals have gone about this, but no clear source of information from which those of us who are learning can benefit.

With the support of The Staff College, I approached a number of principals who had at least two things in common: they were known nationally for innovative and successful management styles, and I had the honour to be personally acquainted with their work. This second point was important because I wanted to feel able to ask them to write in a vibrant personal style. I also wished to balance contributors in a way intended to bring out the efficacy of quite different management styles and emphases.

The result is, I believe, both unusual and of great value to all of us working in colleges. The principals who have generously contributed a paper have agreed to

expose their personal visions and philosophies in a very open and potentially vulnerable way. This is what makes their accounts so valuable. In each case the reader is taken into the thoughts and resulting actions of a senior manager in an exceptionally revealing and instructive way. Each is quite different, but each demonstrates a willingness to grapple with presenting the underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs which guide his or her work. Perhaps this is itself a key feature of those who are successful managers of cultural change.

To attempt to summarise these contributions, or provide some form of commentary, would be facile and inappropriate. My responsibility is, I think, to assist the reader to make best use of such rich material by providing some background, and some brief indication of the ground covered by each contributor. That is the point of what follows.

WHY FOCUS ON CULTURE?

Managers and staff at all levels in colleges have many jobs to do, embracing financial, personnel and curricular management of a wide nature, at least since the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

It is curious, however, how little attention culture change in colleges has received, to judge by published material. Honourable exceptions to this are the work of Colin Turner, and some other publications by The Staff College, particularly **Managing colleges into the next century** (Limb *et al.* 1991), describing the work of a number of female principals.

This relative lack is made doubly so by the fact that the last decade of management theory has been dominated by concepts such as 'empowerment', 'leadership', 'customer focus', which describe aspects of organisational culture. Indeed, the message of the most dominant school, at least in popularity, could be summarised as 'Get the culture right, and the organisation will look after itself'. This is the essence of the message Peters and Waterman gave the world in 1982 with the still highly readable **In search of excellence**. Since then a host of imitators have further popularised and reinforced the point. Somehow the slightly dour and dusty, or perhaps oily, world of FE has been slow in embracing this way of doing things.

The signs of this absence are nowhere more clear than in what colleges, and particularly college principals, feel they should value. In many college academic boards there are time-consuming discussions about structure, usually meaning who

reports to whom, and which course should be in which department. Offer a short course on financial management or the personnel requirements arising from such-and-such Act, and it will rapidly fill up. The concerns are worthy, and of course sensible, but somehow leadership, setting and monitoring a culture, steering by values rather than commands, are absent.

I remember a dramatic illustration of this when attending an FEFC (Further Education Funding Council) seminar recently on strategic planning. Here, one might think, if anywhere, cultural values about a college, how it treats its customers, etc., would surface. However, when the consultants came to explain the term 'mission statement', it appeared to many participants to be a strange and alien concept. The questions were all about how long it should be, which words to use, whether it should be at the front or back of the strategic plan. I came away with the feeling that if a statement of mission has to rise in this laboured way, it had probably better not arise at all.

Clearly, things are now changing, and there are many principals who have taken the lessons of contemporary management theory, and are consciously setting out to change college culture. This report represents the work of some leading-edge practitioners who have taken the business of culture change seriously.

Culture management has long been recognised in the private sector as the key to survival and growth. Clearly sound finances and personnel policies are necessary, but they will not alone lead to a vision of excellence and what W Edwards Deming calls never-ending quality improvement. In this respect, the years of being part of a local government structure with all this implies for attitudes to industrial relations, working practices, attitude to customers, etc., are a potentially stultifying legacy. A key responsibility of today's college managers surely has to be cultural midwifery. The key issues for the new FE culture may be fairly simply stated.

Central is the move from an 'allocation' to an 'earning' model of funding. Some of our staff are haunted by the memory of the LEA providing money with a mysteriously fluctuating hand. Somehow the struggle was always to get more, whether for maintaining the college or for staff salaries. Rarely did issues such as productivity, quality or efficiency arise. The challenge is to replace this exhausting memory with an understanding that funding comes from the FEFC in much the same way as it does from a local employer or indeed even from an individual student purchasing a course. In essence the cultural imperative is that there is a need to earn funding from a customer in return for high quality services. The focus shifts from an unequal struggle with a capricious allocator of funds, to the need to attract, retain

and delight paying customers, whether they be a quango, a private company or an individual citizen.

It follows from this that where only reasonably competent performance of duties was required, the emphasis now is on overall customer focus. Hours of work, holidays, reward schemes, all need to reflect these realities. We are seeing the emergence of a new cadre of professional FE staff whose loyalty is to their college and its success.

The college which will be able to fulfil its responsibilities to its customers and to its employees in terms of meeting their aspirations, is one in which customer focus and quality improvement are central concerns. Industry generally has had to learn painfully that these things cannot be 'bolted-on' or 'inspected-in'. They are the very essence of the cultural identity which a successful organisation must develop. They appear in colleges in the large entities such as the flexibility of study programmes for students, and the commitment of staff, but also in the minutiae – the cleanliness of the corridors, the care that is taken to ensure the experience of learning is comfortable and rewarding, are all indicative.

In a recent article in **College management today** (1993), I summarised the management tools for culture change under six headings:

- *clarity of purpose*: the need to form and communicate a clear vision of where the college is going;
- *presentation*: giving attention to clear effective presentation of the vision and strategy so that all may understand it;
- *a published action plan*: setting out the resulting actions so that everyone may know his or her part in achieving the goals;
- *confidence building*: the process of supporting and guiding people to experience their empowerment to act effectively;
- *leadership*: taking responsibility for not only setting out the vision, strategy and action required, but for leading in the process of implementation;
- *a focus on underlying principles*: constantly referring back to the values and standards which guide management action, until they become second nature.

These tools all appear to a greater or lesser extent in the papers which follow. What is markedly absent, however, is any common framework, still less theory, within which principals promoting culture change are working. Indeed, a major lesson for those studying organisational culture is that there appears to be no shared language or set of concepts within which culture may be discussed. It is noticeable that the sheer complexities of the practical seem to defeat the possibility of an over arching theory, or an approach from theory at all.

This may explain the popularity and usefulness of management theorists working outside the academic study of management, such as Deming: they provide syntheses of practical management experience which become a form of underpinning theory. A good example is Deming's famous '14 points', referred to by Tony Henry, which could be described as offering a form of theory, albeit quite different from that found in traditional management text books. Ken Ruddiman contributes to this new form of theory by himself distilling his experience into a number of practical axioms. Ann Limb, by contrast, is clearly more explicitly influenced by theory, but interestingly it involves the perspective of humanistic psychology, rather than that of management. This too is a particular influence for Ruth Silver.

A possible conclusion to draw, and the only one I would wish to offer the reader before turning to the substantive papers, is that through them management theory itself is brought into question. The papers address culture change in an effective, accessible way, yet:

- there is no shared language or view;
- the process can be influenced by some theoretical perspective or may be eclectic or may even generate its own theory in a pragmatic way;
- success appears to depend on individual qualities, and on addressing the complexity of the practical realities of widely differing circumstances.

Perhaps as managers we need a new kind of management theory which does not offer over-arching concepts, but distils and makes available the wisdom of those who, like the contributors that follow, have worked in real situations to change organisational culture.

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Chapter 1

Change where contrasting cultures meet

Dr Will Bridge
Chief Executive
South Thames College Corporation

INTRODUCTION

It is not until you change jobs, move abroad for a while, or live in digs in someone else's house that you realise the pervasiveness of different cultures in different environments. Having moved between industry, polytechnics, the civil service and the world of FE colleges during the course of my career, I have been especially aware of the culture of organisations. Not everyone experiences this awareness. I remember asking the long-serving Head of Art and Design at a previous college what he thought of the prevailing culture of that particular organisation. His answer was 'Culture? What culture? I have been searching in vain for any trace of culture around here for 15 years!' This response conveys a misunderstanding of the presence and importance of organisational culture in colleges. In fact, the remark speaks eloquently about that particular colleague's view that, in a predominantly engineering and business-oriented 'tech college' environment, the prevailing (small c) culture, was to be at best indifferent to, and probably hostile to his priority for an environment which would give priority to 'capital C' or 'aesthetic' culture.

There can be no greater determinant of the success of a modern FE corporation than its organisational culture. Such corporations will succeed or fail by the efforts and dedication of the staff they employ. We all know that staff represent upwards of 80 per cent of colleges' budgets, and are the major source of all activities which the corporation transacts in order to remain viable. Few college personnel have job roles which are so delineated that they are amenable to precise instruction and line-management supervision. This is true whether they are laboratory technicians, law

lecturers or caretakers. All have unusually high job autonomy, and therefore their productivity and dedication to corporate goals will be more determined by the unwritten rules of the corporate culture than any set of job descriptions or line-management roles that could possibly be specified for them.

CONTRASTING CULTURES

This chapter explores how I have attempted to articulate my own views on the importance of organisational culture within a college – South Thames College (STC) – that has gone through a series of major changes, reorganisations and mergers. Our evolution has bought together the disparate cultures of a polytechnic sector college, an adult education institute, the prison education service, and the 'host' FE college.

South Thames College emerged from the Inner London Education Authority (but not immediately from its all-pervasive culture) into local council control in 1989. At that time, STC was a traditional further education college. It was physically, financially and numerically dominated by engineering subjects, and led by senior managers whose initial disciplines lay in the same field.

The first disparate culture to impact upon the college was prison education when, in 1990, responsibility for inmate education at Wandsworth Prison was transferred to STC. The culture that prison educators brought into the college was perhaps surprising for those unfamiliar with the field, in that it was not notably authoritarian or didactic. Rather, prison education culture was seen as educationally advanced in certain areas – for example short modular accredited courses and progressive techniques of teaching basic numeracy and literacy. This culture also introduced an appreciation of the meticulous record keeping and financial tracking. This has since become a way of life in modern FE colleges competing for funds under local management arrangements, and latterly, satisfying the FE Funding Council of our growth levels and achievement of targets.

In 1992 a second new culture impacted upon the college with the merger of parts of South West London College – a former polytechnic sector institution – into the organisation. Their predominant discipline was business studies. The resulting numerical and financial dominance of business subjects within the expanded college significantly shifted our cultural 'centre of gravity' away from engineering. Other aspects of a higher education were also assimilated. Tutorial support, supplementary studies and student counselling were given higher priority than

elsewhere in the college. I saw it as my task to encourage the dissemination of these cultural facets across the whole of STC, not least by provoking staff mobility between the formerly separate college campuses. Finally, and most recently, in 1993, the newly incorporated South Thames College established a 'federation' with the major adult education provider in South West London – Wandsworth Adult College. In negotiating this transfer of WAC from their direct control, the local authority insisted that a number of aspects of the adult college should be retained under the umbrella of the STC Corporation. As a result, the FE college's staff have indeed become aware of the disparate and sometimes contrasting cultures which exist in adult and further education.

This history of merger and evolution has some worthwhile messages for other colleges since many FE corporations will be subjected to such changes as the number of institutions within the sector shrinks and their overall size grows in-line with the expected trends of the coming half decade or so.

One key lesson that I have learnt from STC's foretaste of this trend is that it is unhelpful to view management's task as one of imposing the dominant culture upon the smaller organisation in a 'one-way' process. Almost all incoming organisations will have cultural aspects which are worth disseminating across the corporation as a whole, although there will of course be other facets that need challenging, constraining or even discontinuing. This has proved to be the case in our history of assimilating contrasting cultures. For example, the unhelpful culture in which HE-oriented staff were unwilling to identify and earmark time in the academic year for joint curriculum and staff development and for course administration, needed to be altered, and some of the 'biscuit tin cashbox accounting' methods of adult educators had to give way to more rigorous financial controls required by a large corporation.

We have also learnt that it is impossible, and probably undesirable, to aim for an all-embracing single corporate culture. Contrasts continue to exist between staff who feel they come from an adult education or a higher education culture. Our aim is that this difference should be no greater than that between FE lectures who teach building services engineering on the one hand, and fine art on the other. The key is to establish a common core set of cultural beliefs and which are in harmony with the overall corporate strategic plan.

THE ROLE OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN

I have endeavoured to use the corporate strategic planning process as a key tool in moulding and modifying the organisational culture of STC Corporation. Many staff

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seem impervious to the existence of a particular culture in their section, school or faculty. Consequently, the process of consulting upon and building up a strategic plan has required us to hold a mirror to the organisation and develop greater self-awareness amongst our staff.

One difficulty in using the strategic planning process for this purpose is a scepticism in the minds of many staff that the plan really is a serious statement of the purpose of the corporation, and particularly of the chief executive's real intentions and priorities. I do all I can to relate key decisions, resourcing allocations and major initiatives to the strategic plan, so that staff feel that their contributions to the plan, and their familiarity with it really does get to the heart of what is in the mind of the principal, the chair of the corporation, and other key decision-makers.

ROLE MODELS WITHIN THE CULTURE

Despite starting with the strategic plan I must add my belief that a further key determinant of the college culture is the role model portrayed by the principal, vice-principals and other influential senior staff both within and outside the college. Most particularly, I believe the behaviour of principals and their senior team defines a range of interpersonal and hierachical values which no other management initiative can over-ride. Consequently, a principal's concern for equal opportunities issues, his or her interpersonal formality or informality, the balance between trusting and competitive relationships within the senior management team, and even our dress code and work patterns, give messages about the college culture which are noticed by large numbers of staff, and are influential in moulding the culture of the organisation.

The best response to this unarguable fact is to exploit cultural role modelling. In my case this involves management 'by walking around', clearly articulating to the staff and students I meet on walkabout the culture which I believe will make STC Corporation thrive. Clearly, different principals and management teams will create this culture differently. I have seen effective colleges operating more deferential and hierarchical structures, while their equally successful neighbours pursue democratic, participative and generally flat management structures. My own preference is for an informal and participative culture. While this is just one option, my further priorities for close communication and loyalty to the organisation are, I think, practically compulsory if our FE corporations are to succeed.

Thus, in moulding the culture of STC corporation, I have found it important to appear alert to our students, and express interest in staff welfare, to appear in the staff

car park well before 9.00 a.m., and to regularly pop into the coffee break time during evening classes. Equally, I have tried to both look and behave reasonably accessible to students. It is particularly important to avoid any sense that, 'once you become a manager around here, you can dispense with concern about our students'. They, after all, are the real clients of the business.

OTHER 'LEVERS' OF CULTURAL CHANGE

So, aside from the strategic plan, and the role played by the principal, what other major levers can college managers use to affect cultural change? I believe that most levers are to do with our behaviour towards and rewards we give to the people we employ. In the current climate, financial and promotional rewards are difficult, but job satisfaction and the working environment have a major affect upon cultural values. In organisations where 90 per cent of the budget is spoken for by payroll and premises, the use of the final 10 per cent to enhance the working environment and professional ethos of lecturers, clerical staff, caretakers or whoever, can be incredibly effective in cultural shaping.

A further valuable lever is supplied by outsiders' reactions to the college culture. The traditional source of such input has been the college inspector. Their ability to hold a mirror to the culture of departments or sections has sometimes been very influential. However, it can also be counter-productive where the prevailing staff ethos is to reject inspectors' views as unrealistic and out of touch with the hurly burly of modern FE environments.

Other outsiders' views can also usefully be harnessed. For example, I have found the involvement of corporation members (governors) from the business sector most useful in confronting excessively *laissez faire* cultures in certain college sections. Governors' overt disbelief of slack practices has communicated more clearly to college personnel than I ever could! On a more positive note, influential outsiders who are generally held in high regard – deans of faculty of the local university, or major local employers – if they can be brought in to express support for key changes within the college, have a more reinforcing effect than any home-grown praise or recognition.

Changing employees as people

It has to be recognised that a key determinant of college culture comes from the individual employees. Although it may sound ruthless or even defeatist, I believe

that where that culture needs changing and modernising, an essential lever is making it easier for people to leave. In my experience, few colleges are dogged by excessive staff turnover. Inappropriate cultural values are usually held by people who have been too long, rather than not long enough, in the organisation. Therefore I have concluded over the years that it is almost impossible to have too much selective early retirement and targeted voluntary redundancy within an FE college. As a way of moulding the culture, the process of easing out inappropriate staff members seems, if anything, more potent than the recruitment of new blood. This is probably because there can be little doubt about the traits of long-standing staff members and the consequences of their withdrawal can be more accurately foretold. Conversely, the recruitment process is notoriously inaccurate and people change as they adapt to new jobs within the organisation. New recruits may even be influenced by inappropriate cultural values and almost inevitably take some time to assert themselves in their new environment.

A key balance which college managers have to strike in levering cultural change is how far it is necessary to force the pace of change. Here, differing circumstances have obliged me to operate at opposite ends of the spectrum. The most desirable situation is when the working environment leads staff themselves to conclude that there is a need for cultural change. This happens best where a direct cause and effect relationship exists. For example, we have had little difficulty in generating an enterprise culture amongst staff whose subject discipline, and consequent class sizes, has declined to nothing. Less obvious causal relationships – such as that between an excessively autocratic departmental management style and the reluctance of section leaders to be truly innovative and flexibile – has not been so effective in achieving cultural change.

The bringing together of staff teams possessing disparate cultural values can in itself be a lever for change. For example, staff imbued with a traditional FE culture have reacted enviously to the adult education ethos of trusting their students, assuming that they will be well disciplined, and sharing refectory or social facilities with them. This has led to the most valuable questioning of the staff/student 'apartheid' which was so prevalent in previous FE college cultures. Conversely, adult education staff are impressed by the 'can do' culture of well organised support sections within big FE colleges. They admire the print or audio visual materials provided by learning resource sections as a backup to teaching and learning which represent a real improvement upon their 'cottage industry' culture, and they are prepared to make sacrifices to achieve this.

All these changes require time to mature. I have done my best to secure this through social events, staff exchanges and joint appointments. For example, we arranged for

one term staff exchanges between the prison education section and vocational departments within the FE college. The result was far greater cultural harmonisation than could even have been achieved by means of management edict. Therefore, although it maybe unfashionable, my practice following mergers has been to encourage the kind of 'works outing' which brings together a cross section of staff.

Appearing cultured!

A further lever for cultural change involves physical appearance, aesthetics and other forms of outward evidence. This was recently illustrated by a member of the adult institute who referred to the FE college managers team as 'the suits' – in contrast to their less formal cardigan and pullover style! Equally, our building and premises transmit a powerful cultural message; for example, some buildings cry out an 'engineering/work-house' culture. Although I have never advised my fellow managers on their dress code, I have tackled the exterior and interior environment of college buildings – introducing planters and art work to the predominantly technology-related building and ensuring that computing and IT facilities are near to predominantly art areas.

CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION

Ultimately, cultural change in an organisation involves change in employees' belief and outlook towards the organisation. I have attempted to achieve this through communicating openly and honestly with staff about the challenges which face the corporation, and by holding up high examples of successful cultural change in people who have won something for themselves and the college by adapting their working outlook. This seems far more effective than frightening people into change. Indeed, my experience is that the most desperately precarious and non-viable college sections are sometimes those most reluctant to change. Conversely those which are already thriving may have yet more plans for development, improvement and further cultural change.

Openness of communication is not always comfortable and cultural clashes are sometimes addressed by separate or even secret behaviours between the different groups. Where this has occurred, I have tried to establish projects which expressly target contrasting cultures. For example, two distinctive teams of FE staff sought to develop the subject of performing arts within STC's recent curriculum planning cycle. My attempt to unify the college culture centred upon forming a joint project team drawn from both potential lead departments to bridge their contrasting views of the appropriate culture within which to develop performing arts qualifications.

THE STUDENT CULTURE

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of cultural change to achieve in colleges is that of relating the staff culture to that of our students. This is particularly difficult where students vary greatly. In our case this variation spans from house-bound elderly professional people drawn from middle class suburbs, through unruly engineering apprentices and inarticulate recent refugees, to university under-graduates and even past or present prison inmates.

Perhaps the single most difficult new culture for college staff to embrace currently is that of our 16 to 20 year old mainstream FE student. While some staff may have first hand experience of their lives, through sons and daughters at a similar stage, many are either further on through the parenting process, or too young yet to have experienced it. Consequently, we are faced with a student culture of which staff simply have no experience. For example, most of our classes contain a significant proportion of students who have experimented with drugs, a sizeable minority who have come from one parent families, and a growing number of homeless students and those already having to undertake unskilled work to support their studies. Add to these factors, the increasingly violent environment in which many teenagers grow up, and the intense competition they experience for both work and educational opportunities, and you have a rift of experience and cultural understanding between many college staff and most students which will widen as the 1990s proceed. We have tried to address these challenges with a range of measures, such as the inclusion of student representatives on departmental boards of study and the widening of student feedback and consultative mechanisms. Nevertheless, the scale of the problem daunts me, and represents an area of cultural diversity which will increasingly challenge our ageing population of college lecturers and managers.

THE PROS AND CONS OF CULTURAL CHANGE

It is worth recognising that there are certain disadvantages to the pursuit of cultural change within colleges. Most particularly, principals with a mission to change systems radically are often appointed into traditional colleges by governors who are anxious to achieve a major and rapid organisational upheaval. There are real dangers associated with this (albeit understandable) approach. One such danger is that colleges possessing 'traditional' cultural values have, at best, enjoyed a stable management regime which has facilitated a staff culture of concentrating on students' needs and their changing circumstances. This was certainly the case in the traditional FE college environment I took on at STC and described in the early

paragraphs of this chapter. In these circumstances, the challenge for managers who are well aware that traditional student-centred cultural values must be supplemented by commercial and indeed even competitive values, is to achieve the latter without losing the former.

Equally dangerous is for managers to move too fast on cultural change. Many of us have observed – hopefully from afar – the damaging effect upon college cultures of management initiatives that are fast, too autocratic, or involve changes that are too radical. The resulting damage to colleges is great as they fail to respond and overheat, with resulting retrenchment of existing cultures and staff returning to the values they 'always held'.

To break out of these negative effects, cultural changes in colleges must try to make college staff feel more positive about themselves and their jobs. Intrinsic motivation, fairly modest rewards and recognition can readily turn what many college staff feel as a thankless task into something far more worthwhile. Such incentives can break down unhelpful cultural values such as the 'passing the buck' culture and give way to a more positive 'we are all responsible for our success' mentality. For example, over the years STC staff complained that the September student enrolment produced stresses and strains which are unacceptable for clients and employees alike. Meanwhile, librarians, technicians and other staff not normally considered to be 'on the front-line' kept well away from student enrolment procedures, seeing them as an enormous hassle which did not involve them. When we challenged this view, and involved librarians and technicians (for example) in front-line student enrolment, they gained satisfaction from seeing their eventual clients coming into the institution for the first time. As a result, they were able pass on to students their years of experience, advice and inside knowledge. Indeed, we found that potential students were at least as keen to know about the life of the college from such informants as they were to get educational advice on specific course content.

THE CULTURE OF THE TOP MANAGEMENT TEAM

All of the above changes are best achieved by a senior management team whose own culture is comradely, supportive, hard working and open. It is important to foster a culture of hard work blended with concern for one another, yet making no bones about our willingness to 'play hard' also. As a consequence, it is important for the senior staff to be the first to support social or sporting events for the staff association or for charity. This involves principals and vice-principals conveying a clear human as well as professional face which is recognised by the organisation as a whole. It also involves the principal being seen to fairly reward, but also

squarely confront as appropriate, the successes and the weaknesses of her or his immediate colleagues. If this can be done in a context of clear concern for them and their families, and the expectation of great dedication but also meaningful periods of relaxation and holidays, so much the better.

OUTCOMES – OUR GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

All colleges and their managers will have different objectives for their organisational culture in the 1990s. My own priorities will be for a student-orientated and increasingly quality conscious college culture. I would like this to emerge from an environment in which people feel they have been consulted, and empowered to influence the success of the corporation. I do not entirely equate this with achieving a 'business' culture within the FE corporation. I am also most concerned that we do avoid an excessively bureaucratic culture within the college – despite the temptation to move in this direction as funding council, local authority and European financial regimes increasingly require top management to draw on decision-making data from information systems which are at least one remove from the mass of students who tumble through our foyers morning, noon and night.

Finally, it is only realistic for college managers to recognise that, within our staff teams, a significant measure of counter-culture exists, including, inertia and depression cultures, and in some colleges, sadly, out and out anarchy between management and sections of the staff. The UK public sector of the 1990s seems full of people with the sanctamonious feeling that they did not cause the UK's obvious and steady economic decline – so why should their jobs change to cope with this? Leadership involves taking a more positive view of the change which colleges face, and establishing a culture which seeks out opportunities, and accepts risk taking. College principals themselves will only strive for and achieve such a culture if these are values which are held by their governors and the FE Funding Council itself.

Chapter 2

Constructing capability

Ruth Silver
Principal
Lewisham College

Every cause must affect something in order to produce an effect.

The state of the thing or process affected is just as important to the outcome as is the cause.
Fentress (Biologist)

In the Easter of 1991, one year after ILEA (the Inner London Education Authority) had been so reluctantly disbanded, I was appointed Principal of Lewisham College for a September start. Surprisingly, the five intervening months were not spent in the gathering of information about what was to be faced but were used instead to contemplate what had been profitably learnt in a community college in London's Docklands during unprecedented and sculpted change. Three years on, I have a clear sense of the content of the kitbag carried across the Thames, a kitbag which grew from various aspects of my own background, in particular:

- as a *psychologist* I had learned to wonder about the meaning of peoples' behaviour;
- as a *teacher* I had discovered the value of imagery in learning;
- as a *parent* I had learned about connectedness;
- as a *professional* I experience the power of education;
- as a *manager* I had learned the nourishing value of clarity in structures and systems.

Additionally, I have been supported by knowing about, and using, key concepts from open systems' thinking. Simply put, this views organisations as a set of purposeful activities with a boundary. All living systems, such as colleges, are open: they depend for their survival on a continuous process of exchange with their environment across a boundary. As the context changes, the activities of the system have to change if it is to continue functioning effectively. Thinking in this way about human institutions draws attention to the fact that what happens in one part of the organisation cannot be separated from what is happening elsewhere.

The introductory Fentress quote, which resides above my desk and mediates impulse, serves as the reminder that, at all times, an appreciation of the health of the organisation, prior to 'interference', determines the outcome. There is, therefore, the importance of the fitting action and my first term in the role of principal, was spent with students, staff, sponsors and neighbours in gathering a sense of this college's health. Additionally, a strategic audit of the college was commissioned which examined the college in relation to its competitors, the origins of students, their destinations, and the fit of the curriculum to the economy. A two-dimensional picture grew impressionistic and factually referenced: both turned out to be true.

It is difficult to put into one chapter what is, in truth, four middle volumes in the history of a college and its peoples, in difficult times. It will be unavoidably stark and synoptic. This is my view from the bridge. It cannot be the view of anyone else because they would have been looking at it from different angles and bringing different experiences. This is my analysis alone of how things were and how I, with the authority of my role, set about changing them. I have endeavoured to concentrate only on what I take to be the transferable learning dimensions of the experience. It is how I have learned. People told me of their experiences and I borrowed and tried it; in so doing, I made my own learning – and sometimes it worked. This chapter is offered in such a spirit of exchange. In it, that best of learning devices is used – the story, in particular the story of Lewisham College's preceding two years, and to map from this the useful ingredients in any attempt at constructing change.

THE CONTEXT

In September 1991, Lewisham College was reeling for it had been well and truly raided; first by central government's disbanding of the ILEA – against its constituents' wishes, and then somewhat more reluctantly by Lewisham Council, the inheriting local authority. The two previous owners shared a common outcome: whatever the differing intentions, they had both put the college through substantial financial cuts

as they themselves struggled to cope with and manage such inventions as the Poll Tax.

The results of such attacks – confusion and low morale – were manifest in the college and awaited my arrival but they are worth logging here because they became the driving opportunity for change. Cuts amounting to £2.5 million had been made in the preceding 15 months; the college's first ever redundancies had been experienced; the local authority was managing education for the first time but with a vision of community education which represented a direct clash with the primary purpose of this enormous technical college.

The senior management, genuinely wishing to 'belong' to their new owners, therefore had not felt able to mount the necessary professional debate about difference and the value of vocational education and training (VET) as a route to higher education and jobs. This changed, even distorted, the institution's purpose. The trade unions, understandably absorbed in the protection of past gains, were less interested in sculpting new and more fitting patterns of social relationships. The governing body had been in place, almost unchanged, for a decade. The college appeared to be procedurally bound, lacking in policies formulated, and thus owned, from within; it was 'over-policed' and as a result, a fracture existed between the managers and the locus of decision-making which took place elsewhere unnoticed in the energies of the uncoupling. Added to this, and even more alarming, was the fact that LMC (local management of colleges) was just around the corner to be swiftly followed by incorporation with its vast upheaval.

Other larger social changes had also happened unobserved. Training and enterprise councils (TECs) had been invented with their reframing of the learning relationship; Europe was unnoticed; the full impact of National Vocational Qualifications was beginning to be felt; other colleges and schools were actively and successfully competitive; universities were interested in new relationships, but there did not appear to be any boarders to be repelled! The battling around the separations of the two preceding years had drawn, most understandably, a defensive response from the institution: I had inherited not only a closed system but a Rumpelstiltskin of a one!

In systems terms, the boundaries between the college and the world had been clamped down tight because it felt itself, rightly, to be under attack and enormous social and educational changes had gone ignored.

Two other incidents made the final contribution to a growing hypothesis and, bearing in mind the quote at the beginning of this chapter, to my sense of the state of the object which was to be affected. These were the most disturbing.

Previously the Lewisham inspectorate had reported that, in spite of the 'out-of-timeness' of the college, much excellent teaching took place within it. Indeed, I had witnessed it for myself and was reassured by what I took to be the intactness of that central institutional interaction. I was therefore unprepared for an episode in which a teaching colleague refused a student much-needed assistance. The excellence, it appeared, only operated within the classroom; the corridor relationship was altogether different. The other event, an argument between students in which unusually very few colleagues intervened, led to another conclusion – that there was a distortion in the student/teacher relationship in the college. Staff had retained a culture of only seeing students in classroom terms which no longer suited the new, now local, student body with its surrounding culture which included poverty and violence.

THE HYPOTHESIS

Both conclusions – the existence of a closed system and this sense of a distorted or lost staff/student relationship – led to the formulation of a hypothesis, that Lewisham College, given all that it had undergone, had lost sight of its contemporary primary task. Two courses of actions were necessary: first, to implode the organisation by the use of the outside world thus opening the system to interaction across its boundaries and modernisation and second, to reassert corporately and rapidly the primacy of the learner. The hope began to emerge that maybe, just maybe, the good news was that things were so bad! Tinkering would not do, deconstruction and reconstruction had to be the order of the day. If we could manage this reframing of our context, then a different future could be fostered.

THE FITTING ACTION

Imploding

The first task was to reconstitute the governing body which had appointed me and at the same time to set up a principal's working group on a students' charter, more fashionable in these times than then. Energies were spent finding a new relevant governing body which would bring the strategic skills necessary for incorporation.

It was agreed to ignore the onset of delegation in April 1992 (four months away) and to prepare for the bigger change of incorporation. Mindful of the Stratford case, the college also needed governors who had busy other lives to contend with and who, with training, would be clear about where their role ended and management's began. Other imploding activities took the form of visits from the neighbouring heads of schools, local and national politicians, exchanges with the officers of the TEC, local universities and such community developers as the Inner-City Task Force members and City Challenge.

In addition to the employment interest groups, two governor advisory groups were constituted so that other voices could be heard in feedback. These were the students' forum and the community advisory forum. We were also successful in a bid to participate in the Investors in People programme which allowed us to re-examine the procedures which, by now, belonged to another era and to relocate them in the world of corporations.

Implosion, in short, turned out to be a matter of helping colleagues to understand the source and the nature of the changes required and to sample the evidence for change from the outside and inside environments to reflect rapidly on this and, with assistance, on their role in relation to such changes. In short, to recontextualise the college itself, by allowing the environment in.

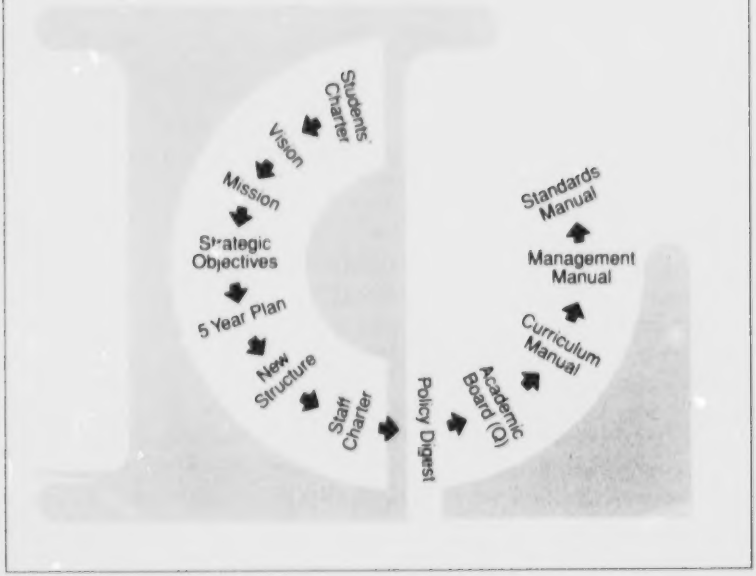
The reassertion

A clear, simple mechanism was needed which not only enabled staff to relate appropriately to students (the promise), thereby asserting the primacy of the learner, but also assisted students to take up their role as learners within the clear boundary (the expectation), of this college and to do so to a corporate standard. The working group on the students' charter had a membership of teaching staff, support staff, students and the careers service. It met on six occasions and produced the first draft of the document. This is not so much a charter, more a way of life and this was deliberate. It delineates a promise to students and guides staff; it explicitly lays out the expectations of students in their role as learners – two standards in one.

It may be a matter of romantic memory, but it seemed that once the draft charter emerged, many other issues and actions eased into place.

Our logo (**Figure 1**), much loved by some of us for its resemblance to an L plate, clearly defines us a learning institution, and indicates the actions we undertook, the

Figure 1: The logo



order in which we took them, and the related sequential place of importance so as to mobilise change. The main events are summarised below in chronological order.

A staff conference on 6 January 1992, brought the staff of the college together for the first time. Staff were grouped into professional groupings and sought to address the statement 'everybody is telling us what to do – central government, local government, employers, politicians, schools, students and parents. Now it's your turn, *you* the professionals give your view of what Lewisham College should be within five years'. The work that day brought 53 reports on curriculum and organisational thinking contributing to the innovations which followed and indeed still feed the planning of this organisation and its decision-making.

A series of imploding inputs was then organised called 'Listening posts for change'. Colleagues and visitors were able to attend lectures by folk who know a thing or ten! Chris Hayes talked about the UK and VET; Geoff Stanton talked about the new

qualifications; Ahmed Gurmah talked about colleges and their community; Tony Tate talked about 'A basis for credit'; Geoff Melling talked about 'Further forward – life after incorporation'. The common theme emerged: the drive for change was multi-rooted and not just a deficiency analysis of Lewisham College, but a sector-wide issue; the sense of victimisation began to diminish in staff.

The local dialogues, the expert witnesses, the internal professional views, the strategic audit of the college, national VET developments; all seemed to strengthen our view that Lewisham's role as a large technical institution should be strengthened, not diluted, by moving into general and adult education. Once endorsed, the part we played in our communities as the vocational provider crystallised into the college vision statement, which defined our place in our enviroment, our relatedness. This in turn enabled the derivation of our mission and strategic objectives. The spine of our five year plan, entitled 'Constructing capability', was uncovered in the reports of our colleagues.

By April 1992, the first draft of the plan had done the rounds, both internally and externally. Its reception was encouraging as indeed was the growing sense that we were in the wrong organisational shape for the task ahead.

In the latter years of ILEA, and encouraged by transfer activities, a market economy had taken over in the 12 college departments. The strong and the popular had moved fast gobbling up scarce resources. Computer courses (the same computer courses) were available in five of the departments at different prices. Colleagues competed with each other, mostly unknowingly, and this behaviour served to illustrate the unkempt nature of the organisation and the internal isolations. A structure specification grew around the clear need to find a relevant, systemic structure, capable of promoting the primary task of constructing capability in an inner city, while celebrating our differences, not forcing a sameness.

Further discussions clearly picked up the pride of the college's vocational identities, and the strength of feeling that the college should continue to serve to the vocational impulse in learners. After intense, though rapid, consultation, a curriculum delivery structure was endorsed by governors, all staff groups and unions; it maps the current relationships of the parts to the whole.

Figure 2 is based around systems thinking and is an attempt to locate the primary task at the centre of the institution – its proper place – and to show us its relation to the comparative parts of the college. The three large faculties with their strong vocational labels are so called to leave no doubt about the role of this institution in

the educational spectrum. The schools' ('petals') titles are intended to be equally clear: these are clearly shown in their relation to the faculties, the environment and the transactions. The 'petals' are closest to the context and so are able to adapt to a changing world. The first point of contact for students is the petal itself, who can refer inwards if necessary, but have a one-stop-shop interaction if that is fitting to student need. **Note: this is not the organisational chart.**

Central to this metaphor, however, is the notion of organicism: old petals/schools will 'fall off' when are they no longer live; new ones will grow in their place – continuous change and adaptation to a changing environment are explicit in this design.

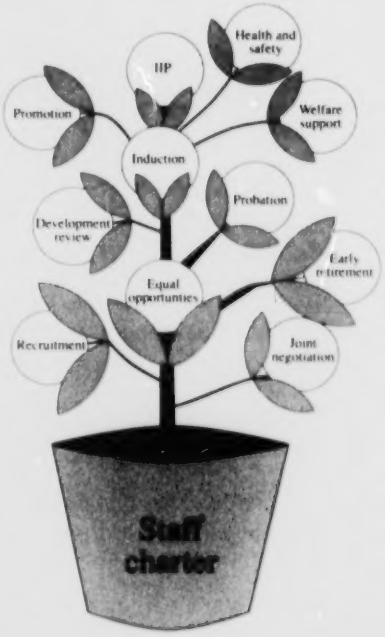
By mid-summmer '92, with this clear sense of purpose, objectives, plan and structure, colleagues who wanted to study did so. It so happened that 10 out of 12

Figure 2: The whole picture

of the senior academic managers took early retirement and the college was able to recruit staff to this dahlia. It is very rare luck to have such discretion and it has meant that the present senior managers have been selected to fit this culture and this system; they are clear about role (both administration and academic), task and identity, and have contributed enormously, indeed they have and led much of the development process since the full team joined in January 1993. They, in turn, consulted and designed their 'petals', recruited staff to them, and finalised their structures, ready for our first academic year as a corporation.

On reflection, the students' charter was a key act, and became the keystone, to the new identity of this institution. It may be no surprise then to hear that in summer 1993, college staff made known their sense of neglect by the omission of a declaration about their value to and in Lewisham College. **Figure 3** indicates what has been put in place to remedy this and its relation to personnel proceedures.

Figure 3: The staff charter



The staff charter is intended to represent to the governors the tone statement for their decisions as employers in education, and to represent to staff, with the code of conduct, the promise to, and expectations of them.

In enormous organisations the value of institutional expectations via corporate declarations and images must not be underestimated for they contribute to building a community within a commmunity working around the same tasks in relation to its communities outside.

Now, next to the Fentress quote on the wall – and it will stay their for another year – is the Chinese proverb which warns against pulling up a young plant to see if the roots are growing well! It arrived in a staff suggestion box – anonymously – I take it to be a systems message!

STUDENTS' CHARTER

The students' charter has two purposes:

- to explain what you can expect when you become a student at Lewisham College; and
- to guide you in what we expect of you.

In Lewisham College, we aim to make sure that every student has the best possible chance of success. We put students' learning first, in all we do; and the charter is a declaration of that commitment.

It is a two-way commitment, lasting throughout your time at the college, and will help us help you get the most out of your opportunities here. Please let us have your comments on the charter.

If something goes wrong, please tell us at once, or let us know if you have any suggestions on how to improve our service to you.

Each faculty office has copies of the students' complaints procedure and student discipline procedure. The faculty administrator will also be able to help with any other queries.

What you can expect from us

We promise to:

- help you to choose a programme of study that suits your needs;
- provide an induction to your programme of study;
- guarantee the delivery of your programme;
- make sure that classes start and end on time (and give you notice of any unavoidable changes);
- offer library and workshop facilities to support your learning;
- give you a clear picture of how you are to be assessed and advise you regularly on your progress;
- encourage you to help you evaluate the course throughout your period of study;
- provide access to advice, information and counselling on any educational or personal matter throughout your time here;
- provide an increasingly safe, secure, pleasant and accessible environment for your studies;
- respond quickly to any problem you tell us about and support you in confidence if necessary;
- promote a caring and supportive atmosphere;
- respect and celebrate the differences of all in our community, with regard to culture, ability, race, gender, age, sexual orientation or social class and the college equal opportunities policy; and
- keep you informed and up to date about developments with the college which may affect you.

The college has a students' complaints procedure to help you if any of the above promises are broken.

We expect you to:

- take pride in the good name of the college and abide by college rules;
- take responsibility for your learning by attending regularly and punctually, working hard at your studies and completing all your assignments on time;

- co-operate with your tutors and other college staff and make active use of library and learning skills supports;
- seek help if you need it;
- help to make the college a safe place for all;
- be considerate of the rights and interests of other college users;
- take care of the college buildings and furnishings, and respect other peoples' property;
- treat everyone with respect, regardless of differences in culture, ability, race, gender, age, sexual orientation or social class;
- play an active part in equal opportunities by:
  refusing to take part in jokes or behaviour that degrade others;
  challenging and reporting discriminating behaviour;
  taking pride in yourself;
- let us know quickly if you feel we have not provided the service we have promised, or if you have any other problem.

The college has a students' disciplinary procedure which will be referred to if necessary.

STAFF CHARTER

What is the staff charter?

The staff charter is a statement of intent by the governing body of Lewisham College to improve the quality of working life for the corporation's staff.

It has five clear aims. It will:

- aim to improve quality of services to staff;
- provide staff with more choices;
- make sure that staff are involved in decisions that affect them;
- make sure that each member of staff is clear as to what standard of treatment they may expect;
- make sure that each member of staff has the opportunity to develop the skills they need.

The corporation undertakes to create a working environment for all its members of staff where:

- the dignity of individuals is respected;
- satisfaction and a feeling of worth is achieved;
- colleagues' efforts and competencies are acknowledged;
- equal opportunities exist for all to realise their potential.

The corporation recognises that joint endeavour is the key to successful implementation of this charter which requires first class communication and active participation by all staff.

How will the staff charter work?

Lewisham College believes that its staff are its most valuable resource and so wishes to provide for them the best working conditions we can afford; valuing our employees must go beyond this. Staff involvement, consultation and communication all play a major role in motivation. Senior managers within the corporation will lead and take responsibility for these issues.

The corporation recognises that all staff have a key role to play in improving the quality of life for those within its community. Quality services to students is the prime objective of the corporation; and as the guiding principle, the corporation will adopt the position that students and service delivery come first within the corporation's priorities and allocation of resources.

The quality of the corporation's services depends on the performance of its employees and the way in which they are treated. The charter aims to raise the standards of treatment of the corporation's staff and to enable them to foster pride and satisfaction in their work.

Wherever possible the corporation will take the initiative to create and maintain good employment policies which:

- recognise individual and team contributions;
- encourage participation, innovation, delegation and decision-making by allowing individuals the freedom to act within their area of responsibility;

- provide all members of staff with training and coaching, with regular constructive feedback, to enable the potential to develop within the college.

The commitment

Lewisham College Further Education Corporation is committed to:

- providing fair and equal treatment for all staff;
- providing a clear statement of what is expected of each member of staff and giving regular feedback on their performance;
- treating each member of staff with courtesy and consideration;
- communicating with, consulting and providing information to staff, particularly on matters that affect them;
- promoting personal development and maximising both individual and team performance among staff by encouraging new ideas and initiatives;
- identifying and encouraging staff training and development;
- providing the opportunity for staff to express their opinions concerning policies and working conditions;
- providing employees with knowledge of the aims of the corporation as a major provider of education and training for the people of Lewisham and beyond;
- providing a safe and congenial work environment; and
- promoting and protecting the health of staff.

All staff share responsibility for good working relationships whereby attitudes and conduct can have profound influences.

Chapter 3

Changing college culture

Tony Henry
Principal
East Birmingham College

In memoriam Dr W Edwards Deming
born 14 October 1900 died 19 December 1993

This chapter is dedicated to the memory of Dr W Edwards Deming who died in December 1993 after completing his seminar course at Los Angeles University. He commented that he had 'made it to the end'. The chapter comprises thoughts and ideas from business and industry. It is guaranteed free from any work which was not written in the 1990s or is not at least 2500 years old – nor will there be any references from academics. It is primarily addressed to senior managers in schools and colleges because, as Deming's 14th obligation of management teaches us, 92 per cent of everything that is wrong with an organisation is management's fault. Managers create the system and workers work within the system. Lousy system equals lousy product or service.

> Students are the most important visitors on our premises. They are not dependent on us, we are dependent on them. They are not an interruption of our work, they are the purpose of it. They are not outsiders of our business, they are part of it. We are not doing them a service by serving them, they are doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to do so.
>
> Smile, dammit, smile. Never treat students as enemies, approach them as potential friends. Think of students as guests, make them laugh. Acknowledge their presence within 30 seconds: smile, make eye contact, say hello. Talk to them within the first three minutes. Offer product advice where appropriate.

Smile. Always thank the student and invite them back. Treat the student as you'd like to be treated.

The two quotations above are taken from the chief executives of a computer company and the founder of a retail chain. The only change is that in the original quotations the word customer appears instead of the word student. At the heart of any cultural change in colleges there has to be a bone-deep, gut-felt belief in these two statements or I would advise you to stop reading this chapter now. Nothing else will do. Tokenism cannot work. If you have arrived in 1994 and you are only just thinking about learning agreements or student charters because you have been instructed to do so by the Secretary of State then you are already too late. If the majority of people involved in your strategic development planning for the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) are not students, clients, customers and suppliers of your college, what decade do you think you are in? There has been a learning agreement between the students and East Birmingham College for five years. At our strategic planning day in November 1993 students, clients and customers outnumbered academic and business support staff. In fact, the high spot of the day was the following interchange between a 19 year old, second year BTEC Social Care student and the regional director of the Further Education Funding Council. Our colleague from the Funding Council had succinctly explained how the new funding methodology had been arrived at through the numerous consultation processes over a period of 11 months.

Student: You mean a student sits down with a tutor and they agree what the student wants to learn? If the student is successful then you fund the college fully for that success?

FEFC: Yes, that's about it.

Student: What took you so long?

Speed, flexibility, rapid response are central to the task of leaders of organisations in the mid-1990s.

None of the following is compulsory but then survival never was.

You can't do it all at once but you must.

In the nano-second '90s there will be only two types of manager: the quick and the dead.

The quotations from Deming and Peters give a hint of what you are in for in the rest of this chapter. Anyone interested in the detail of how fast, smart organisations

operating in the deep, turbulent sea of real-time information have killed off their sluggish competitors who relied on planning and futuristic information should read any of the case studies in **Liberation management** by Tom Peters (1992) or **Speed and strategic choice: how managers accelerate decision-making** by Eisenhardt (1990). I share fully Peters' suspicion about corporate planning and agree with him in preferring 'mental maps'. However, that's enough of the theory; the purpose of this chapter is to concentrate on practical ways of achieving culture change. As I have very little experience of other organisations all the examples will be taken from my own experience of being principal of East Birmingham College over the past seven years.

East Birmingham College is a medium sized further education college with about 7000 enrolments. It operates from its biggest centre in the middle of a post-war council estate and in 15 access centres straddling the inner city areas of East Birmingham. According to the Department of Environment Z score (based on social class, ethnicity, unemployment, overcrowding, lack of basic amenities, single parents and pensioners living alone) the immediate catchment area of the college is ranked in the worst 2.5 per cent in the country. At the time of writing, the college had achieved its growth targets for the FEFC, was predicting a balanced budget and had entered its third year as a registered firm accredited to BS 5750. Having ploughed through the mountains of potential performance indicators on which to judge the performance of the college, the corporation has decided on two:

- delighted, successful students; and
- positive cash flow.

Of course, this is a perfect model including a feedback loop because delighted (not satisfied), successful (as agreed by tutor and student) students will produce a positive cash flow and as long as that positive cash flow is then spent on those students then we will have more delighted, more successful students. The obvious question to ask at this stage is, 'How can you tell?' The answer to this will give more practical answers to how you change a culture.

The number of students at East Birmingham College has increased year by year (except for a year of imposed, deliberate cutting) in spite (or because) of the fact that we have no prospectus, nor do we have anyone responsible for marketing. Our simple credo is that we have 7000 travelling sales people in the form of our students. They speak the appropriate community languages; they talk to about a hundred friends and relations every year and if they are getting a good experience they will spread the good news. Conversely, if that experience is lousy they will also spread

the word. An initial step at the college was to upgrade student facilities by ensuring that there were not separate staff facilities. Overnight this improved student toilet and refectory facilities without having the much feared detrimental effect on staff facilities. In fact, anything that is good enough for our students is good enough for our staff.

Another way of finding out whether students are delighted is to ask them. First, I have not had an office for over two years; this means I have to hang around the college talking to students and staff. I need to borrow their working areas in order to sign the odd letter. I need to learn from students the latest advances in new technology in order to make my job a lot easier. I listen to student complaints particularly about my own teaching. In the year before we introduced our student complaints procedure in 1991 we received five complaints. In 1991 we received over 150 complaints. I do not believe that our service had worsened; we just got better at listening.

Second, teaching is seen as an heroic activity at East Birmingham College. All staff on academic pay scales teach: this has involved the banishment of co-ordinators, open learning managers, development officers, marketing managers, European liaison officers and enterprise unit managers from the college. All teaching staff teach, including all members of the principalship who have a weekly teaching programme. This ensures daily or weekly contact with students. The new heroines and heroes of the organisation are the tutors. They are the only ones who will be able to deliver the information demanded by the recurrent funding methodology and the student-tracking demanded by the Funding Council. They will be involved in intensive training and will be rewarded for the arduous task that they will have in the new structure. How will all of this be paid for? By the redistribution of resources from middle and senior management. When I joined the college the senior management team comprised nine people; it is now four. Senior management costs (levels 1–3) at East Birmingham College are 3.25 per cent of total salary compared with the national average of 4.4 per cent. The fact that everyone teaches also means that excellent learning practitioners can help colleagues in the spread of good practice.

As well as delighting students it is important to track student success. Again there have been quantum leaps in student success in whatever way that success is measured. The criteria for success are determined by students with the help of their tutors and course teams.

To ensure positive cash flow, employ an excellent accountant and an excellent personnel manager. Do not try to do this job yourself. Do not turn into an accountant

or an auditor. Concentrate on your strengths: curriculum and students. Encourage these young people you appoint to give straightforward, fearless advice and always acknowledge it. Ask dumb questions such as 'Why?' but always listen to the answers.

As well as concentrating organisational structures on our customers and those who support them in front-line activities (the Japanese 'genba') it is also important to ensure that single staff status is achieved in the organisation. Layers of management must be reduced, lines of management must disappear, structures must change rapidly according to the demands of the service. Thomas Melohn, the Chief Executive of North American Tool and Die, summed things up at the national quality forum in Boston, USA. His very short address to hundreds of senior managers was this:

- our most important corporate asset is our fellow employee;
- truly good people really do want to do a good job. They care – a lot;
- machines don't achieve zero rejects. Systems don't achieve zero rejects. People achieve zero rejects – people who care;
- our fellow employees are absolutely no different from us;
- treat your fellow employees just the way you want to be treated;
- the person doing the job knows it better than anyone else;
- people don't work just for money. All of us know that. There are values at least as important as pay;
- care, really care for your fellow employees. Isn't that what you want for yourself?

Care seems a very strange word for the chief executive of a highly unionised, metal-based enterprise to use, but it is one of a number of words which find themselves in Japanese mission statements but which are absent from many British ones. Care, love, trust, honesty, decency, passion, warmth, soul, delight, thrill and surprise are words which leap out of Anita Roddick's **Body and soul** (1992). They are not usually heard in many college management team meetings; things might be more interesting if they were. Work has to be about fun, excitement, challenge and interest

or our colleagues will not be stretched. All we have to do is trust them, train them, trust them some more and train them again. Again the model is simple but what does it mean in practice? It means a lot of blood, sweat and tears. The move to single staff status as a logical extension of a college's commitment to equal opportunities is not an easy one. Of course there are vested interests; naturally there will be suspicion; yes, we have had four one day strikes – but that is the cost of democracy. However, you must have the belief that it is all worth it. The whole of the principalship is now on the same contract as my personal assistant. The corporation wants all staff in East Birmingham College to be on a single contract by 1995. We will make it.

However, more important than contractual issues are other messages which the culture can give to the people in an organisation.

Do all your cleaners have pigeon holes? Is there a weekly bulletin or newsletter which updates staff on what is happening in the college? Did you stop sending memos six years ago? Was the inaugural meeting of your academic board cancelled because the college was closed due to snow? Was the academic board unable to set a date for its next meeting? Have you managed without an academic board for five years? How long did it take your organisation to ensure that all staff had the opportunity to read and comment on the recurrent funding methodology? Do all members of your staff have the opportunity to work with a computer from their homes? Is every member of staff in a team? Are all staff given regular weekly time off to attend team meetings? Is between one and two per cent of your recurrent staffing budget spent on training and development? Have all your staff been involved in the creation of quality assurance systems? Have you ensured that your best teachers are not promoted out of teaching but stay teaching and lead your quality system? Have you abolished timetables and clocking on for those staff who do not want them? Do you have totally free, unmetered access to photocopying? Do you encourage the borrowing of college equipment by staff and students? Has your college changed its structure at least a dozen times in the last three years? Has your college refused to introduce any appraisal system in recognition of the fact that appraisal is Deming's third deadly disease? Is upward appraisal encouraged at all levels in the college? Is your long-term plan every Monday morning to get to Friday? Do you care, really care, about the people you work with? Do most people smile; is work opening the doors to our hearts? Any colleague with a function described as human resource management obviously would be ruled out. People are not human resources; they have strange foibles such as families, tragedies, hopes, dreams, wishes, needs and emotions. Unless we recognise these then we will never let our people achieve their full potential. Most of that full potential has already been achieved very early on as colleagues from Cape Cod Community College in Boston

recently reminded us at an excellent conference organised by Clarendon College, Nottingham.

> Most of what I really needed to know about how to live, and what to do, and how to be, I learned in kindergarten.
>
> These are the things I learned. Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash hands before you eat. Flush. Warm cookies and milk are good for you. Live a balanced life. Learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.
>
> Take a nap every afternoon. When you go out in the world, watch for traffic, hold hands and stick together. Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the plastic cup. The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.
>
> Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the plastic cup – they all die. So do we.
>
> And then remember the book about Dick and Jane and the first word you learned, the biggest word of all: LOOK. Everything you know is in there somewhere. The golden rule and love and basic sanitation. Ecology and politics and sane living. Think of what a better world it would be if we all – the whole world – had cookies and milk about 3 o'clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankets for a nap. Or if we had a basic policy in our nation and other nations to always put back things where we found them and cleaned up our own little messes. And it is still true, no matter how old you are, when you go into the world it is best to hold hands and stick together.

What we need to understand is that all of our people – our students and staff – live really sophisticated, fulfilled lives outside of the college. A number of managers seem happy to ignore this fact when working with them inside college. The task of the leader is to ensure that we use these experiences for the good of the individual while not imposing our will on the outcome. Lao Tsu (1991) in the **Tao te ching** summarises the task beautifully and simply:

> Imagine that you are a midwife; you are assisting at someone else's birth.

> Do good without show or fuss. Facilitate what is happening rather than what you think ought to be happening. If you must take the lead, lead so that the mother is helped, yet still free and in charge.
>
> When the baby is born, the mother will rightly say: 'We did it ourselves!'

Although a lot of what is written above sounds 'soft', it is in fact a lot harder than the traditional managerialism of the late 1980s. The timid prefer the calm of despotism to the boisterous sea of liberty, Cicero reminds us. Once you have let your people go you cannot get them back. You have to be comfortable not knowing where your people are and the only way you can be comfortable is to hold on to the vision. Valerie Stewart in **The David solution** (1990) describes it succinctly:

> When Michaelangelo was asked how he had created something as beautiful as his statue of David he said, 'It's easy. You just chip away the bits that don't look like him.'

Our central task must be to chip away those things that don't look like a college as we approach the millennium. This is not an easy task and a lot of it is down to luck, fortune and circumstance. However, Tom Peters does give us 50 ways to get lucky in the Beyond hierarchy series:

- Act bats.
- Try it.
- Ready. Fire. Aim.
- Anything worth doing is worth doing poorly.
- Read odd stuff.
- Visit odd places.
- Make odd friends.
- Hire odd people.
- Cultivate odd hobbies.
- Work with odd partners.
- Ask dumb questions (e.g. 'Why?')
- Empower.
- Train without limits.
- Don't back away from passion.
- Embrace/pursue failure.
- Take anti-NIH (not invented here) pills.
- Constantly re-organise.
- Listen to everyone.
- Don't listen to anyone.

- Get fired (more than once).
- Trust intuition.
- Don't hang out with 'all the rest'.
- Decentralise.
- Decentralise again.
- Smash all functional barriers.
- Destroy hierarchies.
- Open the books.
- Hasten information flow.
- Take sabbaticals (long ones).
- Do the opposite of what you've been doing for the last three years.
- Repot every 10 years.
- Spend 50 per cent of your time with outsiders.
- Spend 50 per cent of your outsider time with whacko outsiders.
- Pursue alternative rhythms.
- Spread confusion in your wake.
- De-organise.
- Dis-equilibriate.
- Start a corporate traitors Hall of Fame.
- Give out Culture Scud awards.
- Vary your pattern. (Breakfast cereal, route to work, anything.)
- Take off your coat.
- Take off your scarf/tie.
- Roll up your sleeves.
- Take off your shoes.
- Get out of your office.
- Get rid of your office.
- Spend a week at home working.
- Develop peripheral vision.
- Don't 'help'. (Zip your lip.)
- Avoid moderation in all things.

If you've managed to get this far in reading this then there is some hope for your students, staff and you. If you are interested in any of the ideas, the reading list at the end of this piece will put you in touch with some 'whacko' outsiders. Colleagues are also welcome to visit East Birmingham College at any time in order to talk with our students and staff and to steal our best ideas. When the Japanese engineers and scientists decided to share their secrets with their American colleagues in the late 1970s the Americans were very suspicious. They wondered why competitors would wish to share secrets of the trade. The Japanese said, 'It's simple. You won't

believe us. You won't do anything about it. By the time you realise we were right we will have moved on even further.' I hope that this is not the case with readers of this chapter. The challenges are too great to ignore; we have to ensure that not only are our people well qualified to help rebuild our economy but that we are sure about the values we are helping to instill in our people. Professor Richard Pring at the North of England Conference in January 1994 quoted a letter from the principal of an American High School to her new staff:

> Dear Teacher,
> I am the survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no person should witness: gas chambers built by learned engineers; children poisoned by educated physicians; infants killed by trained nurses; women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates.
> So I am suspicious of education.
> My request is: help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmans. Reading, writing, arithmetic are only important if they serve to make our children more human.

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Chapter 4

Inspiring a shared vision

Ann Limb
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BUILDING OUR MISSION

The mission statement is a simple statement of purpose and direction for a college, or any other organisation, seeking to meet people's needs. The mission can be straightforward or complex, but the language and style in which it is framed says a great deal about what the organisation is really like.

Milton Keynes College mission is to value and celebrate diversity. We aim to promote the personal growth of our 8,800 learners, by fostering a sense of confidence, self-esteem and responsibility. We strive to recognise and nurture individual development. We encourage all of us associated with the college to regard ourselves as learners and to develop our own approaches to learning. We seek to acquire this inner discipline, not for conformity, but in thoughtful responsibility for ourselves and others.

The common theme in our mission is a focus on learning being at the heart of everything we do. We have no illusions about learning being easy, or ignorance of the pitfalls and diversions that lie in its path for each individual. Our aim is to create the best possible environment for enabling and advancing the learning process and it is the rigour, integrity and coherence with which a college does this which is so crucial.

This raises the question of how exactly learning is to be understood. At Milton Keynes College we regard learning as basically a process of personal development

for which the learner must share responsibility with the teacher. As Carl Rogers says:

> I know I cannot teach anyone anything. I can only provide an environment in which he can learn.

The college is that environment. The business of management lies in ensuring that the whole organisation works towards this goal. The role of the principal in particular is not only to ensure the systems are in place to foster learning, but to think through the impact of one person's learning on another. The college is a network of learners which embraces students and staff, governors and employers, parents and the wider community and it is important that all have opportunities to develop and enhance each other's progress.

THE UNDERPINNING MODEL

The theoretical underpinning to our vision has its origins in humanistic psychology, and particularly the work of Rogers and his associates. Once learning is understood as synonymous with personal growth, the role of the learning organisation becomes clear. It is to create the best possible environment for growth, and as far as possible to remove barriers. These barriers may take many forms whether external such as lack of resources, prejudice or depressed expectations, or internal to the person. The point of a college is to help to remove them, or at least mitigate their effects. This is quite different from seeing learning as primarily a process of filling learners with knowledge. Such a view would make learners passive and reduce a complex process to a simple act of imbibing. This is why the culture, people and structures of a college cannot be seen as accidental factors; they are the key to success for learners. In my experience, even organising the learning environment for responsiveness to people by, for example, providing resource-based learning centres, is not sufficient. Ways must also be found to enable people to recognise and work through their own internal barriers to learning. This can involve controlling fear, lack of self-awareness, immaturity and inadequacy. I believe these emotional and internal barriers are best worked with in a culture which fosters openness and one which gives the learner a chance to explore, free from ridicule or condemnation. This is why all involved must see themselves as active learners and why the attitude and behaviour of the teacher/manager is so significant.

I am told that this theoretical basis stands open to the critique of promoting individualism and potentially destructive competition. Individualism is not the

same as individuality which seeks to encourage each learner to take responsibility for their part in the learning process within the context of a collective framework. At Milton Keynes College staff recognise and try to celebrate diversity, and therefore try to understand the economic and cultural environments from which our students come. It would be unrealistic as well as erroneous to try to separate people from these factors. Both opportunities and barriers relate to the context from which the learner comes. All learning both benefits from this context, and to some extent challenges it. An approach which separates the individual from his or her history and culture is inevitably limited. Learning is an holistic process.

PROMOTING LEARNING

Promoting learning as our dominant culture has proved successful when measured both in terms of examination results, and feedback from students. There are, however, risks in this approach, and no guarantees that it will always be successful. The role of the college in creating and managing a learning environment is crucial but, in the end, successful learning, new insight and therefore personal growth will depend on the learner's own capacity and willingness to change. For me, there is no alternative to promoting growth, but the possibility that some learners may not overcome the barriers they face has to be accepted.

This approach which I am told at first sight appears simple is, I believe, extremely demanding. It is based on the assumption that we can and wish to develop and that we are open to confronting the pain associated with this. This means living and working with our own vulnerabilities, inadequacies and mistakes and being willing to make improvements. If a college is to promote itself as a learning organisation, the values associated with learning must be lived by all, not simply espoused. This can be very threatening and demanding, especially since it must pervade the whole institution. The values of individual growth bring students, teachers, support staff, managers, employers and governors together. It is still a relatively unusual alliance in further education, and one which lies at the heart of the culture of Milton Keynes College.

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP

This emphasis on creating a community of learners does not replace the need for leadership. Rather, it redefines the role of the leader. In essence the head of the college must not only promote the values and oversee their implementation, but

must embody them in his or her own practice. The principal of a college based on a commitment to individual learning must be committed to a learning approach to all his or her management functions. This is quite different from exuding confidence based on the ability to manipulate and control. In some respects it involves giving up some of the prerogatives associated with traditional management. It involves accepting, and where appropriate displaying, the vulnerability and fallibility involved in all learning. Indeed, openness and vulnerability are not traditionally associated with leaders, and may be misinterpreted as weakness. Such an approach requires a reconstruction of the leadership role away from the dominance of omnipotence and strength into a focus on growth and transformation. I believe that contemporary political leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Mary Robinson provide role models for this kind of leadership as does the philosophy of Lao Tzu who said:

> As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence:
> The next best the people honour and praise,
> The next the people hate.
> And when the best leader's work is done,
> the people say we did it ourselves ...

THE PRINCIPAL AS TEACHER

The acknowledgement that all members of the learning community are both learners and teachers is, I believe, one of the keys to culture change. The process of openness to learning must be lived every day in practice. The college principal, the organisation's most visible leader, is arguably also its most visible teacher and learner.

My own practice is always to try to work 'at the edge of my competence'. By this I mean to expose myself to the potential pain of change by seeking new learning experiences, as well as fulfilling the leadership expectations placed upon me by the office I hold. A relatively recent and powerful learning experience for me arose from my participation in the *Funding learning* group established by the Further Education Funding Council. To understand this work required my learning new skills, and being exposed to the complex and threatening difficulties of working in a group to seek an equitable set of funding arrangements. The task demanded openness and humility, the tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity and the ability to compromise – all essential features of any learner's experience.

As the college's chief executive officer, I also seek out opportunities to demonstrate my commitment to our primary purpose – namely teaching. Although unable to take a regular class of students on a weekly basis, I teach on a range of short courses and run staff training and development workshops in house and externally. In the learning organisation every opportunity for learning is an opportunity for teaching and I am not a college principal who bemoans the exchange of the classroom for the boardroom.

It is always difficult to find out to what extent the culture change which is taking place at Milton Keynes College is known and understood throughout the organisation. Learning takes time and must be planned and organised. I hold individual meetings lasting 1 ½– 2 hours with at least 100 members of staff each year in an environment which is purposely structured to enable learning and feedback in both directions.

In keeping with the overall college philosophy perhaps, the key is that I see my role as constantly creating opportunities for understanding and confronting difficulties and therefore for development. There can be no guarantees that opportunities will be taken up, but the challenge is one of finding ways for each learner to access them in his or her own way. A good example is the way in which our mission statement itself is handled. By publishing and constantly reworking it, it can become meaningful to more and more staff and students who have contributed to and shaped it. Clearly, being involved in producing the mission statement is not the same thing as understanding it and putting it into practice, but it is perhaps a necessary precondition.

As a learning culture has developed and grown over the last five years at Milton Keynes College, I have also had the experience that the growth model which seeks to enable and optimise learning can also be an inhibitor and disabler for some people. This is because growth and change, especially if the status quo holds comforts and privileges, are not universally welcomed. Learning opportunities may be painful and threatening and for this reason are resisted by some.

THE PROCESS OF CULTURAL CHANGE

The question arises as to whether living the college's mission and vision is enough, and whether, in addition, it is also helpful to reinforce understanding and learning, from the top – through a more formalised presentation and explanation by the principal. My view is that the important thing is for the vision to be present in everything I do as principal and in everything we do as a college in our publications,

advertising, our behaviour and literature. Some colleagues will respond well to the 'top down' explanation. Others will view the principal's attempt to explain his or her values and organisational strategy with a more critical eye.

The position accorded to teaching and leadership in the learning organisation is high profile. It would be easy therefore, to mistake the role as a simple exercise of a dominant personality moulding and shaping others' perceptions. Clearly, each personality exercising leadership is important in their own way, but the growth model of learning is based upon embodying the vision not exercising particular personal traits. In some respects the leader gives away, or at least carefully circumscribes, his or her own powers and rights. This kind of leadership is not primarily concerned with a personal concern for status and power although these have their place.

At Milton Keynes College, for example, there are no designated car park spaces for the principal or other senior managers. For five years, my senior manager colleagues and I shared (sometime to great discomfiture as well as immense benefit) the same work room space because the college was short of accommodation. It is important by these symbolic means to demonstrate that in a community of learners, the leader is not pursuing his or her own comfort and privileges.

In a learning culture which operates on the principle of delegated authority and responsibility it is also essential to have clear boundaries around all job roles and responsibilities. I expect colleagues to take responsibility for the decisions which fall in their agreed areas of professional competence in the knowledge that they will not be over-ruled by the exercise of the principal's authority. Leadership does not seek to manipulate and control, but tries to live and guide the vision of openness to learning.

CHANGING CULTURE IN PRACTICE

Cultural change and development at the college has been mapped through five key processes. These processes, described below, focus on key activities of college life:

- staff;
- strategy;
- structures;
- systems;
- style.

Together they form a matrix of constant culture shaping and development. The process of transformation has followed five steps as follows:

Step 1 – Challenging the process

All college processes, from interactions in the classroom to recruitment and selection, can be improved, and many will need continuous change and review. This is vital, but requires experimentation and a willingness to take risks. Making apparent certainties problematic involves threats for somebody in the organisation including the threat of failure for the change agent. We strive to create an environment where failure is allowable as a learning experience, and risk taking is encouraged as the key to development and improvement.

Step 2 – Inspiring a shared vision

This step is the title of this chapter because it lies at the heart of culture change. Only by envisioning the future can it ever come closer to reality. That vision is not the prerogative of any one individual or group although it must be clearly articulated and understood. In my experience, this is the principle accountability of the organisation's chief executive. It is important then to network and enlist others in the constant process of defining and refining the future we want to create.

Step 3 – Enabling others to act

If change is to be successful, all who are willing to change must be enabled to become involved. The principle of co-operation is vital; without it the college cannot exist as a learning community. As things are, some people will feel more able than others to act. The point is to create the kind of safe, but demanding, community which strengthens people to be able to act positively. This is the real meaning behind the rhetoric of building on people's strengths, and its success is proved in our gaining the Investor in People award.

Step 4 – Modelling the way

Everybody within the learning community is a role model. The point is to try to live with the vulnerability and complexity of learning. Exhortation rarely moves minds, but examples do. I have come to the conclusion that, while the occasional grand gesture might be helpful, it is the 'small victories' which are important. Moving the organisation on in small and multifarious ways allows everyone to contribute, and the learning community to benefit in total.

Step 5 – Encouraging the heart

None of this is easy. It takes more than intellectual commitment. Culture is built by recognising contributions and celebrating accomplishments. Neither vision nor culture can be built without heart-felt personal involvement, and this is as important as the grander public celebrations which also have their place.

THE DISSENTING VOICE

Finally, it is necessary to comment on the issue of dissent. A shared vision can become a monolith of received wisdom, more spoken about than lived. But a living culture, especially one based on growth and development, must also encompass and acknowledge the role of dissent. The dissenting voice is vital to the life and growth of the vision. This is not at all the same thing as subversion; a provocative act of deliberate perversion. Dissent is essentially constructive, forward-looking and questioning.

At Milton Keynes College I am trying to discourage the idea of a uniformity of view, approach or behaviour – 'singing from the same hymn sheet'. This is not the particular form or 'corporateness' which I find acceptable. I think of the college's mission and learning vision as a tune and a tune which all of us associated with the college know and can play. However, a visitor to the college will hear the tune sung or played in many different ways. The point is that the tune will be recognisable and well played or sung, whoever is the musician and however they choose to interpret it.

It will never be possible to say that Milton Keynes College has achieved its aims: still less that the philosophy of creating a learning culture has 'worked'. As I have said, in conventional terms we are a very successful college which has grown in size over the last eight years from some 2,000 learners to over 8,500. We have increased our staffing by 50 per cent and our students' achievements continue to improve. The real issue, however, is whether we are creating a culture which can offer a model for a thriving, effective, learning community. I believe we are, and that there is already the beginnings of a convergence of the ideas that seemed remote to some in further education only recently. In the end it is an act of faith – and one I think is worth the effort and sometimes pain it takes to create.

Chapter 5

A vision and culture for the future

Richard Gorringe
Director
Norton Radstock College

INTRODUCTION

This chapter sets out the vision we have adopted for the future of Norton Radstock College. It attempts to describe how the vision involves a culture shift, and how we are making this happen.

BACKGROUND

Change in both school and post-school education has been commonplace for many years although the pace, certainly since the 1988 Education Reform Act, has been noticeably quickening. The recent report of Sir Claus Moser 's National Commission on Education (NCE 1993) is the latest of a long line of reports calling for ever-more radical change. What is driving this desperation for change and improvement?

The answer is almost certainly a changing world in which a complete global re-ordering has been taking place since the end of the Second World War. The post-war world was dominated by the Western powers, whether victorious or not. The economic giants rapidly became the USA and Germany, and later Japan. British industry also had a strong position throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s. As early as the late 1960s there were signs that things were changing. We now know that both Britain and the USA would experience economic decline from the mid-1970s onwards. Germany, which seemed so secure, is now plunged into recession. Even Japan, still dominant, is experiencing unprecedented economic troubles. Clearly something new is happening.

The new factor seems to be the rise of certain Third World economies. These are around the Pacific Rim, in the Far East such as Malaysia and Singapore, and increasingly in South America, particularly Brazil. Only just behind, but moving at an astonishing pace, is China. These economies show extraordinary annual growth rates well into double figures. They are benefiting from the very lack of an industrial history which previously held them back. They have no Victorian legacy of an infrastructure built to meet the needs of a century ago, or of the attitudes to work and education which pervade countries like Britain and America. Their governments are determined to invest in the latest technology, and the very best education and training. There is a positive attitude to enterprise, hard work, competitiveness, and above all education and training.

A key issue is that these countries are not making the mistake which delayed prosperity even in Japan, i.e. producing masses of cheap, shoddy goods which became by-words for poor quality. They are investing in the very highest quality in manufactured goods, and in services. Their watchword is customer satisfaction, with the result that they are winning world markets in everything from machine tools to tourism, away from Western countries. The question therefore arises: what can the United Kingdom do to avoid global marginalisation, economic ruin, and mass misery for her people?

The answer is that we must understand the world economy in quite new terms: basically the terms introduced by these new economies. If we refuse to change we shall slip further and further behind with poverty, misery, and an increasingly violent society as the 'have-nots' grow in numbers. These things have started now: the urgency to change is really quite dramatic.

WHAT COURSE TO TAKE?

The only possible answer to this question is encapsulated in the term first used in 1989 by the CBI – the 'skills revolution'. Britain must invest in new products and services, but in everything we do, the focus must be on quality. By doing this, although we cannot compete on labour costs, we can at least level the playing field with the emergent economies. We must ensure our managers and workforce understand the importance of customer-driven quality in both products and services. Products must be properly designed and built to give satisfaction at all times. Services must be delivered in ways which put the customer first and spare nothing to give delight and satisfaction. This requires a much better educated and trained workforce: hence the 'skills revolution'.

As part of this drive for quality, we need to:

- eliminate every kind of waste, whether of materials, energy, or people's time, in an unrelenting drive for efficiency;

- constantly review and upgrade our technology such as computers, which add value to human skills;

- create as rapidly as possible a different kind of workforce, based on individual development and initiative, to take this vital quality mission forward.

It is in creating the workforce which will produce the necessary quality, that the role of further education is highlighted. Our task is nothing less than to facilitate this quality revolution in industry. At the same time we have to offer people the skills to survive and prosper in the new kind of society that is emerging. The old certainties are falling away: people who will prosper are those who have the flexibility and adaptability to live and work in new ways. All of this requires a new kind of education at all levels. Our role in FE is key because we can, if we can meet the challenge, be the primary way in which people of all ages acquire, adapt, and upgrade the skills they need for productive, satisfying lives.

THE ROLE OF FURTHER EDUCATION

We have to ensure that we can offer people the opportunity to:

- develop, and continuously update, vocational skills and competences, as represented in National Vocational Qualifications;

- develop vocationally-related core and transferable skills, especially through General National Vocational Qualifications;

- develop and deepen the broader educational and interpersonal skills to enable an individual commitment to quality of performance in all its aspects;

- develop flexibility and adaptability to both new technology and new working styles;

- understand and apply quality management processes, including very basic statistical skills;

- enrich their personal lives so that continuous, lifelong learning becomes the norm.

This is a very broad vision, because it relates to the whole person, and defines education as a form of personal growth. Nothing short of this is required if we are to create a learning society which can face the current, and likely future, global challenges. The key is that people must be able to change and develop so that they can have the confidence to gain some control over their futures, not become victims. This is why FE is moving centre-stage: education is now a strategic industry for Britain. It is no accident that this is also being recognised in the USA and across Europe. The irony is that the successful world economies have always treated education in this way.

HOW HAS THIS BEEN INTERPRETED AT NORTON RADSTOCK COLLEGE?

We believe that if we are to survive, we need to deserve to survive by making our contribution to this gathering national scenario. There are two key ways in which we can contribute: through the programmes and courses we run, and through the kind of organisation we seek to be. We are clear that, as the American quality guru and management theorist W Edwards Deming, said, 'Survival is not compulsory'. We work in the market-place. By our own understanding, good-sense, and responsiveness we can succeed. There is no grandfather figure who will ensure we do the right thing. Our future is based on our intelligence, energy, and above all, willingness to change.

As a college, we have started at the level of the courses and programmes we offer. These are our products; our culture must grow out of, and be rooted in, the way we develop them to relate to our customers' needs now and in the future. In moulding our culture we need always to keep in mind the purposes we seek to serve. Consequently we aim to:

- ensure that we are contributing to the National Targets for Education and Training (NTETs) by ensuring all our vocational programmes lead to NVQs or GNVQs, thereby raising their currency in employment terms;

- enable as many people as possible to enter higher education through both GNVQ and access programmes, since higher levels of skill and capacity are increasingly called for;

- offer all our programmes in such a way that understanding of quality, and the individual initiative and interpersonal skills which it requires are fully developed;

- offer core skills in all modern languages, and generic abilities, such as problem-solving, to all;

- work closely with local employers to ensure that we are meeting their employees' needs for upskilling and reskilling as industry changes: soon afterwards is not good enough;

- provide the tutoring and learning support which students will need to become independent, autonomous learners, able to go forward into lifelong learning.

These developments are all underway to some extent. What we are now attempting is the transformation of our organisation so that it becomes the kind of learning institution which the rest of British industry must become if it is to survive. In short, we must all exhibit the qualities of commitment to personal growth and development, lifelong learning, and flexibility and adaptability in pursuit of quality, which our students so urgently need. We must mirror in our own way of doing things what we offer individuals and businesses. It would be a nonsense to offer these to others while clinging to the old ways ourselves.

This is where vision is truly needed. Further education has been characterised by extraordinary rigidities and has been slow to change. Time-honoured patterns of attendance, opening and closing dates, work roles, hours of work, have all continued even though the world around us has changed. The position is now critical: we can be the key to the country's future or we can become classic dinosaurs, clinging to old ways while prosperity and a decent harmonious society are destroyed.

Our cultural transformation is therefore based on the following goals:

- We all need to be aware that our efforts and dedication are the only things that can make Norton Radstock College thrive and grow. We believe all are responsible for marketing, customer care, obsession with quality and success. These cannot be left to people who bear the title manager.

- Every single employee of Norton Radstock College must understand the vital importance of his or her role as part of a team of people developing a new kind of organisation. Quality is everyone's concern, and shows in everything we do from the cleanliness of our corridors to the excellence of our examination results.

- We must create a culture of independent professionals who strive for high quality and expect to be rewarded for it. This is quite opposite to a dependency culture where salaries rose by a mysterious process of national bargaining, with no reference to the performance of the organisation.

- We need to commit ourselves very publicly to customer-led quality, and work together to implement it in everything we do from answering the telephone to marking assignments.

- We need to be prepared to change in response to individuals' needs, no matter what this may require. At the moment this means moving away from the concept of the academic terms to year-round opening, and adopting programme profiles to suit our customers. It is no good complaining that this is difficult or challenges our own working patterns: we simply have to remember that 'survival is not compulsory'.

- We must rapidly become a community of relatively autonomous professionals working within a clear strategy for the health of our organisation, and ultimately our own good.

In essence, the vision is of a college in which managers are strategic thinkers and planners, not controllers; where each employee recognises his/her own contribution as the key to such things as status and level of remuneration; where thinking about quality, and elimination of wasteful practices, is second-nature; where initiative is regularly used to better meet our customers' needs; where the accepted right thing is whatever enables us to serve individuals and employers; and removing barriers to learning is the greatest good.

Perhaps the ultimate cultural shift is that we stop thinking of the college as an employer on whom we are dependent, but realise the college is nothing more than our collective energies and good sense. For everyone to ask 'what can I contribute to this vision?' is the key step to creating the rewards we all want and need from our employment. By doing this we will be mirroring the process going on throughout

British industry and showing our customers that we truly practice what we preach. We shall then become the lifelong learners which it is also our privilege to create in our unique professional role as facilitators of others' learning.

WHAT ARE OUR LEVERS OF CULTURE SHIFT?

Perhaps most importantly we have created and defined a role for the senior management team which consciously takes responsibility for cultural change. Organisational culture does not change by magic. It requires an unremitting process of definition, change and reinforcement. This must start at the top, and then be carefully spread throughout the college. As principal I expect, and encourage others to expect, the maintenance of what are really standards of performance. These have never been written down, and intuitively I suspect that to do so would be a waste of time and effort. Broadly, they involve:

- Every manager taking responsibility for his or her own area, e.g. marketing, buildings, staff development. This means that they are both empowered, and expected, to develop clear published strategies linked to the overall college strategic plan; to translate these into action plans; to pursue these plans; to report back to the team on progress; and above all to master all the facts and data, including financial, relating to the area.

- Every manager expecting, and demanding, to be held accountable for the performance of their own area. If there are questions which require answers, e.g. by the Funding Council or DFE, it is important that the manager concerned takes responsibility. This is his or her source of dignity, worth and growth; not to be held accountable would be disempowering.

- Every manager acting at all times as the ambassador for the college. To each member of the public, whether customer or prospective customer, the first member of college staff they meet *is* the college. Once again, taking responsibility is required. I emphasise that our role is to solve problems and ensure the customer is delighted and satisfied. Everyone is empowered to take whatever steps are necessary; this overrides all other rules. We have, for example, a policy on the circumstances in which fee refunds may be given. This policy sets a framework: the real 'policy' is ensuring that as far as is reasonably possible the customer seeking a refund leaves the college with a warm glow from having been

treated with dignity, fairness and having had their problem resolved to their satisfaction.

- Every manager being willing and prepared to work as long and as hard as required to get the job done. This is one reason why we have adopted a new, flexible contract of employment. It not only sets a framework of hours in the week and weeks in the year, but carries a powerful message. The real contract is that the college really is run by a team of people. Each one is empowered to act as they deem right within the broad framework of the college's strategy and statement of values. In return, the expectation is that they will do what is necessary to pursue the business of the college, without counting hours. This does not mean that we all sacrifice our personal lives; it means that everyone is free to manage their time so that if a period of intense college work is required, it may be balanced by commensurate attention to personal needs and responsibilities. Not counting hours cuts both ways: if someone needs space to recuperate and refresh, that is as important to the college, as it is to them.

- Every manager always thinking about effectiveness, efficiency, economy in order to ensure we are providing value for money. There are always many ways of doing things, and it is still common to see managers trying to operate without a sense of guiding values and standards. Managing is not necessarily easier, but is certainly more transparent and accountable, if what is done is always that which is most effective in delighting the customer. This must be seen in the context of efficiency. In essence, this means always avoiding waste and achieving the goal with the best possible return on resources invested. Finally, resources are always finite, and there is always a judgement to be made about what is worthwhile. Economy means using the least amount of resources to secure a given goal. Like all values, these do not automatically produce the right answer; they provide yardsticks by which a proposed course of action may be evaluated.

As a team of people we do not live up to these standards all the time; learning takes time for everyone. By working in this way, however, we are able to take our message out into the college. I am sometimes asked how we managed to persuade 100 per cent of our academic staff to accept a new contract of employment. Clearly, anyone could have refused to do so. The answer is that the contract is merely the outward form of working in a new way, and there are very few staff who do not hunger to work in new, more self-respecting ways. It is true that the new contract could lead

to managers exploiting staff, but it could also lead to staff 'playing the system' of flexibility. We offered our staff a bargain, and most took it willingly.

This process also illustrates a further component of culture shift. There must be absolute determination and clarity of purpose throughout the college. Time spent generating this is well spent. Our three-year strategic plan, for example, went in draft to every single member of staff. Meetings were held at which everyone was enabled to speak their views. Our site manager told me after one such meeting that this was the first time he had ever been asked his views on the direction the college should take.

Finally, the one overwhelming factor which must be present in any culture change is simply confidence. In a turbulent and confusing world there are many influences which damage and destroy confidence. This happens at institutional level when managers become demoralised when, for example, some source of funding is reduced or lost altogether. It happens at individual level when the weight of behaving in new ways and taking responsibility for problems can suddenly seem overwhelming. The point is to expect that there will be difficulties, and that the only way to overcome them is to use the strength of the team. Within the team, I believe it is the principal's key responsibility to watch for signs of failing confidence and act positively to restore it. This might almost be a definition of leadership. It involves not a facile optimism, but pursuing a belief that by acting together within a framework of standards, people can achieve their goals. Problems have to be shown to be not threats to this process, but opportunities to move forward, i.e. not to be side-stepped or ignored, but to be squarely faced and tackled.

CONCLUSION

Nothing in this paper is new, still less original. Similar thoughts, better expressed, may be found in the work of Deming, Juran, Crosby and in the more populist mode, Peters and Waterman. However, what may be of interest, is that the ideas appear to be working in a college, just as they are elsewhere in British industry. Perhaps by this means not only shall we transform our institutions, but find a new and better rapprochement with the people throughout the rest of industry and commerce whom we seek to serve.

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Chapter 6

Culture change: a personal view

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INTRODUCTION

'You can sense it the moment you walk through the front door' so say the old hands. 'You can tell whether there is hope in the classrooms, contentment in the staff rooms and goodwill in the departments. Alternatively, you can sense whether the institution, its staff and its procedures are in a state of terminal decay.'

Laying aside the degree of arrogance in the statement, it is undoubtedly true that different institutions do convey different vibes to both lay or professional visitors, and the instant image, the warmth of the decor, the appearance of openness and the bustle of activity can convey a very positive image of an institution. However, this may simply be an image, a contrivance of communication. An organisation may wish to present a contrived image designed to induce in the visitor a particular impression, not to reflect reality. It is quite possible to manipulate the receiver of the image by controlling the media of communication. It is clearly important to distinguish the underlying culture of a college from artificial by-products of image-making.

These introductory paragraphs convey a degree of scepticism which the reader may consider inappropriate for a paper on culture change. However, equally inappropriate would be the assumption that all change is good and culture change can only result in something better; different yes, but the case for value added is not automatic and cannot be proven in every instance.

NATURE OF CULTURE

The culture of an institution is the network of values and beliefs that provides the context in which decisions can be taken, and the backcloth against which subsequent justification of the resulting actions can be made. The network can be based on truth, reality and historical fact or perception, myth and legend, and as the second grouping is more interesting, that is the one which will tend to dominate. In handling change of culture, therefore, it is likely that managers will be more successful by appealing to the heart than to the head. Handling organisational myths is a key part of the management of college culture.

Some culture networks, for example, may generate hopes and aspirations which are unrealistic. To be successful the manager must exercise selective constraint to ensure that ideas, however worthwhile, which are not fully achievable are kept under control otherwise the line between optimism and cynicism will be rapidly crossed.

SOURCES OF CULTURE

The culture of an institution may appear to be natural, organic even, arising from the living filigree of human relations which provides the dynamism of the institution. In reality the culture is more likely to arise from a series of casual reactions, some accidental and some contrived, but which provide a constant opportunity for interaction by the influencers and moulders of the culture who may be, but need not be, the current managers.

CHANGING CULTURE

Built into any culture there is an equilibrium. On one hand, people wish to move forward, believing the 'grass always greener'. This is balanced by the power of the status quo usually being a safer option. This equation must be challenged if change is to take place. However, there is no right or wrong in cultural terms, only that which relates most successfully to the current or anticipated set of circumstances. The success of the managers' tactics to influence the culture will depend on their perceptions of these circumstances, together with their acumen for seizing the correct moment for action.

Non-intervention is not a realistic option. Abrogation of the influencer's responsibilites to change the culture will not necessarily result in no action and no change, but simply in a loss of influence. In these circumstances the change process will appear to take on a life of its own and any subsequent attempts at moulding will prove more difficult.

THE CLIMATE FOR CHANGE

In the Western musical 'Paint you Wagon', the pioneers sang the following:

> Where are we going? I don't know,
> How will we get there? I ain't certain,
> All I know is we are on our way.

The constituents of the climate surrounding that intrepid band included the following factors:

- movement;
- general direction (westwards);
- hope and aspiration (aims and mission);
- togetherness (team work);
- uncertainties and a level of anxiety (fear of the unknown).

No doubt in reality the wagon masters would play on each of these in turn and in different combinations to achieve their perceived outcomes, namely getting the wagon train to its destination. No doubt the master would receive performance related pay at the end!

Other elements which those who would mould culture may call into action include:

- the use of a common language exclusive to the culture (acronyms perhaps);
- the fear of a common (uncontrollable) enemy (the TECs perhaps?);
- the defence of territory (vocational work in schools?);
- imperialism (recruiting 14–16 year olds to college?).

These all have a degree of permanency but there will be others which arise from time to time which can provide a temporary opportunity for exploitation.

THE RATE OF CHANGE

Consider the following ways of describing institutional culture:

Dynamic	Outward going, open, expensive, appears in part periodically to be out of control.
Proactive	Initiatives sought and successes looped back and shared.
Constructive	Most initiatives responsive, some self-initiated.
Response	Identifiable initiatives pursued, significant failure rate, successes not capitalised.
Passive	Receives and absorbs influences with little perceptible movement
Dormant	Little to be seen, few opportunities to make value judgements.
Stagnant	Influences and consequences out of control within an inert environment. What one sees is not pleasant and changes are perceived as being for the worst.

We can debate the actual descriptive phrases but a superficial analysis of such a continuum will throw up certain characteristics.

First, changes at the bottom of the ladder will be more difficult to initiate, to develop and to build on and generally the institution as a whole will move at a common speed and to a common pattern, thus penetration throughout the college will be slow. Towards the top, the main characteristics will be movement, indeed some parts of the institution may be proactive, others dynamic, but the lines of communication and the teams will interact at different speeds and there will be the appearance of urgency and, if success is looped back, achievement.

Second, at the lower levels habit and routine will play a bigger part in the process and the result will be security, safety, certainty, habit and long lead times: not in themselves 'bad' characteristics. At the top end will be risk taking, challenging of the unknown, questioning, non-conformity and short lead times: not in themselves 'good' characteristics.

Third, at the lower levels control and monitoring will be easier, and at the higher levels delegation and trust will emerge as more significant.

One illustration may suffice. An institution which has developed in an atmosphere of manipulation and distrust will seek to protect its members by lengthy and

complicated rules, understandings and codes of practices. Remove the distrust, demonstrate that even if it results in failure, reasonable risk taking will not be penalised, and the need for the codified protection will be minimised. Clearly this building of trust takes time; a commodity which currently is at a premium.

As the college moves through to a situation where lead times are shortened and decisions made at a faster rate, the proof of fairness and equity in decision-making will become more demonstrable. The speed of current demands and the recent changes required of us are working in favour of this process. Thus a 'yes' institution where management decisions have on balance been more positive than negative will provide a better basis for further progression than one where any decision has to go through a committee cycle involving ever-increasing paper justification. Decision-making in this sort of college is enveloped by excessive caution through fear of repeating past failure.

As always a balance must be struck. A series of decisions, however good and taken however fast, must be able to be justified against some criteria other than the whim of the manager concerned. The secret must surely be to provide enough water to keep afloat without providing enough to encourage drowning.

OWNERSHIP AND DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES

Enabling staff colleagues to feel a part of the institution will better occur

- if they are able to understand the rationale behind the priorities of senior managers; and
- if they are given the opportunity to make constructive criticisms without managers feeling resentful.

This does not mean that a panoply of participative procedures should be encouraged in an attempt to display a democratic spirit. Indeed, the past history of executive academic boards displaying power without accountability often resulted in culture slipping from the active range to the passive.

Fairness, sound appeals procedures, grievance processes able to be pursued without rancour or the fear of reprisals, sympathetic appraisal arrangements, involvement in the quality monitoring process at the lowest level in the hierarchy; will all contribute towards the cohesion of a culture characterised by movement rather than inertia.

Involvement of staff colleagues in procedures which they understand and have had a hand in shaping, and in the future will have influence in modifying, will create the climate where the movement which is required can be achieved in a reasonable period of time.

A balance where staff can be confident without being cocky, and relaxed without being sloppy, will probably create a climate where sensible and realistic culture change can be achieved.

With goodwill, many systems will be workable; without goodwill, no structure or process, however good in theory, will work in practice.

'THE IMPOSSIBLE TAKES A LITTLE LONGER'

No movement and little dynamism will occur unless expectations are raised – the art of the possible must be demonstrated. However, if at the same time unrealistic targets are set and impossible timetables expected, then little movement will occur and the hiatus will be filled by stress and frustration. It is at this stage that the vision should be supported by sound management techniques.

One person's space for development appears to another as a vacuum where nothing is happening. If the vision is to be shared, so should the process. Equally, too close scrutiny of every minor problem on a regular basis is both time consuming and threatening to the individuals concerned.

Project management is an art in itself, as is the skill of delegation. It will enhance the dynamism of the culture if it is applied uniformly, and in a way which draws out the talents of the individual(s) concerned. At the same time it needs to offer the opportunity for continuous dialogue, including the modification of targets or the adjustments of timescales. Many managers have yet to learn this aspect of their work. 'Delegation is giving those things we don't like or cannot handle to those people we do not like or cannot handle', the view of yet another sceptic perhaps, but in practice if this is the view of the recipients of the delegated responsibilities, the development of a dynamic culture will be resisted.

REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS

Punishments are unlikely to play a part in the development of a dynamic culture, and there are many ways of rewarding other than bonuses or performance related pay.

It is said that the British have difficulty complaining but equal difficulty in saying thank you. A progressive culture is enhanced by managers offering a series of structured short-term targets with varied negotiated review periods and points where assessment can be made and accolades offered. If the accolades can be offered in public and the criticisms remain private, so much the better.

One of the best ways of rewarding in a progressive culture is to share successes. The more successes that are publicly shared, the more opportunities will arise for the sharing of failures and problems which can be seen as a common threat for a collective response.

LEADERSHIP

The role of the head of the institution is crucial. This need not be by him or her exhibiting a high profile, or a romantic, contrived charismatic leadership. Indeed, many dynamic cultures founder on the person at the top not achieving his or her self-established targets, or to put it more bluntly, being found out.

Humility and honest self-assessment are characteristics rarely found in the higher echelons of our profession. The maintenance of the principal's position in the hierarchy is often protected by layers of acquiescent staff awaiting 'Buggins' turn in the institution – difficult to penetrate and impossible to reason with. Alternatively, some consider a suitable solution is for principals to project him or herself as one of the 'workers', but this requires a degree of regular sustained effort which, if not achieved, will result in more resentment than the remoteness it replaces.

Staff who will be the vehicle for progressing the culture want to have confidence that the vision is clear, the direction has been identified, and the problems of delivering the programme or the strategic plan are recognised by those who can combine their experience and overview with compassion and understanding. Thus, the dynamic culture can accommodate many different forms of leadership. The skill comes in assessing one's own strengths and weaknesses and compensating for these by making new key appointments of staff with the skills required; tactical delegation to others with the current skills who are already in the system at a senior level; or secondments on short-term contracts from staff at more junior levels.

In terms of self-assessment, history records a new principal who inherited the stewardship of an instituion whose staff had been trying for three years to get a bus stop moved a hundred yards so that it would provide a facility right outside the main

entrance to college. Within three days of taking up post, the bus stop was moved. The principal knew of the 36 month campaign and to be fair did not claim credit for the move; neither was the credit disclaimed. No-one pursued the matter and the principal by default received the recognition. The episode passed into legend. Subsequent miracles were more difficult to achieve.

Much myth surrounds 'charismatic leadership'. The development of institutional culture should not, however, be dependent on the charisma of the head. Charisma is simply a perception which is manipulated by the transmitter of information, being selective in the manner, rate and structure of the images transferred about his or her own actions. However, charisma can buy time, and those able to manipulate communications to achieve charisma can use this time to provide space allowing under-achieving areas to catch up and provide more secure foundations for the next stage in the development of the culture; but charisma is a by product of the interaction of personalities, and should not be consistently used as a management tool, lest the magic disappear and normal human frailty re-emerge.

A series of tough unrelenting targets will not offer the space needed to provide the required foundations. The skills of time management should be cultivated and applied. A new person in post, for example, will have a honeymoon period – within that period new brooms can sweep clean, new targets be set and enough time offered for initial success to be achieved, measured, recognised and rewarded. The skilful leader will ensure that the rapidly changing environment in which we work will enable a series of honeymoon periods to be established. This will only be achieved if the manager consistently works at keeping all situations fluid with short-term objectives, short contracts and secondments, and repeated reinforcements and praise.

HANDLING CRISIS

A test of the true nature of a culture and whether or not it will endure is how the institution, its personnel and its processes, handles crises. If the immediate reaction is to panic or to induce a siege mentality, the culture is fragile and much more work will be needed properly to embed it. A series of short-term targets followed by urgently arranged meetings to find out where we go from here will not reinforce vision, mission or encourage competence in the leadership – short-term targets must been seen as manoeuvres or tactics and must be structured into medium- and long-term strategies.

Finally, let us revisit the vision and the mission. Like everything else this should be the result of a balanced approach. To achieve ownership, the vision/mission should be sufficiently vague to be all things to all people. Or put it more kindly, each member of staff should see part of his or her person and job hopes and aspirations in them. At the same time, it should provide opportunities for more detailed development on which targets can be set, achievements recognised and sharing pursued.

Perhaps the FE motto for the next decade and the basis for our future culture should read 'Who shares – wins'.

Chapter 7

Re-engineering the culture of a college

Nick Lewis
Principal and Chief Executive
Broxtowe College

In 1988 I was appointed Vice-Principal at Broxtowe College Nottingham and in 1991 I succeeded John Hall as Principal. My previous experience included lecturer and manager appointments at colleges in Leeds and Hartlepool, and a period in the Education Department of Cleveland County Council.

The college I joined in 1988 was noted for its close community of staff and a traditional programme of well-respected courses. My previous experience of college–employer links and the 'new FE' provision motivated me to introduce change which was designed to support diversification and the development of new markets.

A common factor in those colleges who have successfully introduced new and dynamic FE provision has been the high level of individual motivation. Staff are more keen to develop an interest in growth and new work in an environment which encourages enterprise, supports endeavour and is well managed. It is the role of managers to create such an environment with clearly defined and communicated values and priorities. It has been our aim to help all those employed in the institution to develop a sense of ownership and participation in the college's future. Staff reach their full potential when they understand and identify closely with the key purpose of the college; to effect improvements in the quality and quantity of educational opportunity we are able to offer people in our community.

This chapter describes the management process which has been aimed at creating a culture change to support and improve enterprise and responsiveness to the market. The college's ability to adjust to change has been an essential feature behind

an expansion of student numbers and improvements in competitive performance. Culture, which influences both individual and corporate behaviour, was usefully defined in a report for the college entitled **Review – the management of change**[1] as 'the commonly held beliefs, attitudes, values and norms that exist within an organisation'.

Two major factors affected the environment and required a college response in 1988: the impact of the 1988 Education Reform Act, particularly the loss of LEA income to the college, demanded a more coherent and flexible form of strategic management; second, the increased complexity of the college's potential client groups in a highly competitive market demanded more scope for enterprise and innovation amongst staff linked to delegated decision-making and formalised accountability.

A central feature of the college's response to new environmental factors was the management effort directed towards changing the organisation's culture. **Review – the management of change** describes a model which proved useful in evaluating management options for creating cultural change.

> One helpful theoretical model sees the culture of an organisation as being subject to two opposing types of factors. On the one hand there are those forces that drive cultural change (e.g. external influences, changes in senior management, crises or opportunities); on the other there are those forces that tend to restrain cultural change (e.g. rigid organisational structure, past or present success of the organisation, high proportion of long-serving staff). Having identified the opposing 'forces' present in a given organisation where culture change is desired, the task of management is both to strengthen and reinforce the effect of the former type and to weaken the effect of the latter.

The description and evaluation of managing change at Broxtowe College is set out in three sections. The first deals with the college reorganisation following the 1988 Education Reform Act, the second section covers the work of the Enterprise Project

1 The report was the product of consultancy work undertaken for the college by Nottinghamshire County Council Internal Audit division. The objective of the review was to assess the extent to which the college was taking appropriate steps to achieve the desired changes in its culture. The report entitled **Review – the management of change** was completed in May 1991. Credit goes to David Cowell who undertook this consultancy work.

between 1991 and 1993 and the third, the changes following with the incorporation of the college in 1993.

COLLEGE REORGANISATION – CHANGING THE CULTURE

In 1988 Broxtowe College Nottingham found it necessary to re-position itself in the post-16 education and training market due to a combination of external factors. A small to medium sized college on the west side of the Nottingham conurbation, the institution had a general FE portfolio of courses with a strong history of programmes in engineering and electronics. The decline in traditional forms of skilled employment had by 1988 left the college with high costs per student relative to other Nottinghamshire FE colleges. The competition from other providers was particularly strong in an urban area in which there are six FE colleges, two sixth form colleges, and a number of 11–18 schools. The scheme of delegation that Nottinghamshire implemented from April 1989 projected a 14.7 per cent decrease in the funding allocation to the college, to be introduced at an incremental rate of five per cent per annum over a three year period.

In the absence of any clear intention within the LEA to reorganise post-16 education, the senior management of the college identified a survival strategy that gained the support of governors. The college had neither the advantage of size nor significant specialist provision to develop its unique market position. It was, however, well respected for the quality of teaching and sound administrative systems. The strategy involved three main elements:

- an increase in FE student enrolments through diversification and additional marketing expenditure in order to increase the college's annual formula share of LEA moneys in the second and third years of delegation;

- a reduction in costs through a programme of staff redundancy, deletion of uneconomic courses, increased class size and reduced student teaching hours;

- an increase in non-LEA income, in particular from:
  i) employers, through the creation of a new specialist division called Highroad Training and Consultancy;
  ii) Leicester Polytechnic (now De Montfort University) for franchise HE courses; and

iii) the overseas market, through a vigorous marketing campaign and an improved welfare infrastructure.

To be successful this survival strategy required major changes in staff attitudes and values, together with new management processes to underpin the institution. The forces that restrained cultural change were however particularly strong – low staff turnover, a rigid departmental structure, and a strong sense of past success.

The senior management set about developing incentives and new procedures which encouraged people to buy into the strategy and to reward success. This was accompanied by a large scale re-distribution of resources to the new priorities. Inevitably these changes challenged vested interests and as a result a sense of alienation and resentment developed amongst some staff. This produced forms of dissent and blocking behaviour in some individuals who were able to use college structures to undermine the attempt to implement a corporate re-alignment of the college. To ensure the success of the survival strategy, and despite the dangers inherent in responding to an external threat with an internal reorganisation, it became necessary to destroy certain rigid organisation structures which were restraining cultural change. It was therefore decided to undertake a major restructuring of the organisation with effect from September 1990.

To coincide with these developments the college adopted a planning process involving the publication of a corporate plan for 1990 to19 93 and a business plan for 1990/91 in March 1990. In the first annual cycle this process was driven by senior management although copies of the plans were distributed to all college employees. There was a clear link between development of corporate planning, management reorganisation and efforts to change the institution's culture. Subsequent planning cycles have been more participative as people have become familiar with the new corporate management structure and processes. The distribution of plans and the publication of annual reports celebrating success have, however, made a critical contribution to the development of a participative management culture. They focus attention on the environment within which the college operates, promote a sense of ownership in the organisation's fortunes and stimulate people's interest in contributing to management decision-making.

The structure, implemented in September 1990, was based on a form of matrix organisation involving delegation of responsibility and project-focused management teams common in many US corporations. Research and internal discussions resulted in the publication of draft proposals for a new management structure in January 1990. The move was an attempt to reduce the effect of vested interest and

attitudes which were resistant to change by giving delegated responsibility to lecturing staff and team leaders. The intention was to release staff energy and initiative in support of the college's efforts to develop new areas of work, and allow senior management to develop a more strategic role. The changes were wide ranging and had an impact on the roles and responsibilities of academic and business support staff throughout the organisation.

The reorganisation proposal was developed with the full support of the senior management team. The main body of lecturers and business support staff had reservations that, despite consultation meetings and briefings, allowed those with an interest in opposing change to gain significant support. The effects of redundancy, cost cutting measures coupled with new expenditure in key development areas, all served to reduce morale. Despite senior management efforts to inform and involve staff there remained significant resistance to the proposed changes. Aware that changes in culture and organisation structures were central to the strategy set out in the corporate plan, the governing body supported the reorganisation. It was clear, however, that the success of implementation rested upon the efforts of managers to win the support of college staff.

Despite management efforts to promote the advantages to staff resulting from delegated responsibility and empowerment, a significant minority of staff remained implacably opposed to the reorganisation, many of whom also opposed elements in the survival strategy. With support from key staff and the senior managers, it became an essential task to win the hearts and minds of the majority who were realistic enough to recognise the new challenges and prepared to be open minded about new responsibilities and relationships.

One important element in the strategy to win support was to explain the external context which led to the survival strategy and reorganisation, and also to invite greater participation in college management. These efforts culminated in a series of one day planning conferences led by the staff development officer and attended by all the staff in mixed groups.

At the same time the governing body approved a proposal to commission an evaluation of the management of change with a view to demonstrating to staff that due attention was being given to their concerns and the effects of rapid change.

The work was carried out during the spring term of 1991 following the September 1990 re-organisation by a member of the Nottinghamshire County Council Internal Audit division with experience of management consultancy. The consultant was

selected and the review brief was designed in order to gain a non-educational perspective on the organisational culture and staff attitudes. The methodology included discussions with governors and senior managers, an examination of planning documents, discussions with individual staff, attendance at various college meetings and a staff attitude survey. The review found that:

- with the benefit of staff development the reorganised structure has great potential for a more client-orientated approach and as such is a considerable strength in terms of the sort of 'culture change' envisaged;

- the mission statement could be reviewed to better provide the common ground which would allow corporate purpose to be more widely shared and translated into effective concerted action;

- channels of communication and certain elements of the management structures were still orientated towards the former organisation, with a tendency to reinforce the old culture and make change more difficult. Teams could be given a higher profile and more fully integrated into the channels of communication and management structure;

- formal channels of communication could be improved and made more sensitive to the way in which information is received and understood.

One general observation from the report is worth noting. In its efforts to create 'simultaneous loose-tight properties' within the organisation, the college provided adequate delegation and freedom of action but in the early stages of implementation had not created a sufficiently strong corporate culture and commitment to the organisation's purpose to replace the traditional methods of supervision. This analysis contributed to the subsequent decision to undertake the Enterprise Project development work.

One significant feature that emerged from the process of managing these changes was the difference in response between academic and business support staff.

The business support staff on the whole recognised the necessity for the college to change radically and were particularly concerned to identify ways in which they could help. The prospect of additional responsibility created some apprehension and this resulted in a demand for better communication and appropriate skill training. This group of staff readily identified with the challenges and success of the college.

In contrast, the academic staff showed some resistance to identifying with the success of the college as an organisation. This was influenced by two main factors. The first was the strong priority commitment given by lecturers to students, teaching and curriculum matters. The second was a cultural attitude that promoted a strong sense of individual independence from both the LEA and college management. This attitude is often confused with the notion of academic freedom and leads to the belief in an entitlement to freedom of action totally independent of the employer's requirements. This attitude thrived in an environment in which local authorities ran emasculated college management in favour of central LEA control. In addition, the relationship that developed between LEAs and NATFHE promoted the belief that the responsibility for college management was shared with the lecturers' union.

It has required a concerted effort by college managers to develop quality decision-making processes and promote the recognition of the need for accountability. The Enterprise Project described below was aimed at addressing these issues.

The survival strategy for the college was underpinned by cultural change brought about through re-organisation, corporate planning and staff conferences. The conferences produced a college action plan which addressed issues that concerned staff. These included communication problems, training, staff attitudes, customer care and excessive workloads. By the end of the 1990/91 academic year the experience of a changing culture together with the high profile efforts of senior managers to listen to staff and address reasonable matters of concern had won the support of the majority of staff who had effectively turned their attention to the challenges faced by the college.

THE ENTERPRISE PROJECT 1991–1993

By 1991 the college had adopted a new organisational structure and management style, undertaken a development programme to involve staff in planning and decision-making, evaluated progress in cultural change and prepared an action plan in response to staff concerns. On my promotion to the post of principal in September 1991, I was faced with the task of reinforcing the forces that drive cultural change at the same time as responding to staff concern at the pace of change.

It became clear that leadership and a sound survival strategy is not sufficient to reverse the fortunes of an organisation. For bold initiatives to be turned into operational realities required teams of individuals throughout the college who were

willing and able. The Enterprise Project became the vehicle for developing the skills and initiative of staff as a means of grasping new opportunities as they became available.

The attitude and skills of operational managers became the critical focus for developing a new culture. An external consultant, Enterprise Development Services, commenced work on a project in September 1992 aimed at developing the quality of middle management. The project entitled 'Investing in enterprising people' was in two phases covering the 1991/92 and 1992/93 academic years. The main purpose was to develop the characteristics which would enable college staff to generate ideas and take responsibility for seeing them through to a conclusion. The six skills and attitudes that formed the theme of the development work were: displaying initiative; making decisions; managing resources; influencing people; drive and determination; monitoring progress.

The development programme sought to train management and staff to act as enterprising people. This was followed by managers and staff teams undertaking projects aimed at developing enterprising behaviour and leadership skills which would produce improvements in the college's products and services. The first phase involved eight days of training for all senior and operational managers in the first term followed by project activity with staff teams during the remainder of the academic year. A total of 11 projects were documented and presented to a panel, which included external evaluators, by each of the teams in June 1992 and awards made for the best project and the best presentation.

The consultant worked at various levels of the college organisation during 1991/92 to develop and advise on management behaviour and processes. The development work included improvements to communication, clarification of management roles and identifying standards for corporate management and leadership behaviour.

The Enterprise Project was extended into 1992/93, with a development programme involving selected teams of staff. The college also undertook a training programme in customer care for all staff. Detailed research on changes in staff attitudes and skills formed the basis of the consultant's PhD submission to Nottingham University evaluating the application to a further education college of 'human resource management approaches used by employers to develop an enterprising workforce'.

One immediate effect of the training for managers was to confront the attitudes of those in promoted posts who were unable to come to terms with the evolving role of an education manager. Rejecting the term 'manager' some staff saw their role as

advocate for the academic staff and administrators. Progress in developing new attitudes and values amongst academic and support staff depended upon establishing a coherent and corporate leadership style for the operational managers. This led to further work in developing standards for management behaviour, clarification of responsibility and accountability, and a clear process for managing marginal performers. In the course of this work many established values and attitudes were challenged and it became necessary for senior management to agree common standards of behaviour which could then be required of operation managers. This placed a particular discipline on the senior management with regard to common and explicit values and unity of purpose.

Promoting good management behaviour in support of a new culture has had a cascade effect within the organisation. There are examples of staff at all levels whose performance has been put under scrutiny and as a result of strict management coupled with support and training, improvements have become evident. Peers who see the effect of such a process are encouraged to promote high standards and are pleased that managers are less likely to ignore marginal performers. For the effect to become widespread the management has had to follow up individuals such that redeployment or departure became a consequence of failure to meet the standards set by the institution. This framework for managing people has been developed in an environment that previously shied away from managerialism. It has not adversely affected the deliberate policy of promoting enterprise and staff initiative, and delegating responsibility. It has, however, sharpened people's interest in corporate planning and institutional values as it is increasingly recognised that these have replaced supervision and task allocation as the main guide to individual decisions and behaviour.

The development of a business-like management culture has changed relationships with trade unions. At a local level the non-teaching unions have demonstrated a willingness to come to terms with change, exhibiting some enthusiasm for the delegation of responsibility and participative management styles.

The attitude of the main lecturing union, NATFHE, has, however, been influenced by the increased pressure in the sector for flexibility and efficiency and the issue of less restrictive contracts of employment. It has been characteristic for unions in the local authority sector to believe that frameworks for negotiations with the employers gave them what amounted to a veto on change. To begin to dispel this attitude at a local level has taken perseverance although the incorporation of colleges provided a significant window of opportunity. One tactic that has contributed to changing attitudes has been to demonstrate that union reluctance to negotiate or take part in

consultation once this has been offered within a structured framework has not blocked management action and progress. Having put in place participative management processes the staff feel a degree of empowerment and as a result the trade union has lost its monopoly role in staff consultation.

The college has sought good relationships with recognised unions as a matter of policy. When there is hostility to change from a trade union, our experience has shown that it is essential to manage in an open fashion (no surprises) and give proper and considered regard to staff views.

The focus on behaviour and relationship between managers and staff has been critical to, but not a substitute for, the implementation of the college survival strategy. The measure of success was that on leaving local authority control in April 1993 the college had a small surplus, an increased number of FE enrolments, a new HE programme developed in association with De Montfort University, below average unit costs, a growth in overseas students and a successful training and consultancy business.

MANAGING CHANGE POST-INCORPORATION

With modest reserves the college as a business was fundamentally sound and ready to face the challenge of independence when it left LEA control in April 1993. The reports from Coopers & Lybrand noted that the ability of the college to 'respond speedily to new challenges and initiatives and the ability to redeploy resources have proved invaluable'. Within our very competitive environment it is the college's quality and responsiveness that gives a market edge. This edge is attributable to the culture and organisation of the college, which unlike ideas or individual staff, cannot easily be poached by competitors. The confidence borne of success and pride in the institution makes it easier to pursue open and collaborative relationships with neighbouring institutions.

Incorporation was a significant event for those seeking to change the culture of colleges. As the direct employer of staff a college is now in a position to develop common employment policies and flexible working practices free of local authority control. Broxtowe College has taken advantage of incorporation to pursue a human resource development programme which seeks to improve quality and responsiveness by raising the standards of education management throughout the organisation.

This programme has three elements: developing quality systems which focus upon the accountability at team/lecturer level; introducing flexible working practices and

new contracts consistent with the culture of the college; the phased implementation of a performance management scheme.

The role of the academic board at Broxtowe College has changed twice as a result of legislation in 1988 and 1992. The focus of the academic board has shifted from pseudo-democratic involvement in management to a central role in academic quality management. This involves a process of quality assessments and validations of academic programmes involving teams of staff directly involved in delivery. This reinforces the responsibility of academic staff at the team level and involves a wide range of people in making peer group judgements about standards and quality. The entire process is designed to complement the delegation of decision-making within the college, and there is now clear evidence that academic staff give more systematic attention to quality issues through the daily management of the curriculum.

A new and less restrictive contract of employment has been adopted at Broxtowe College because of the flexibility it gives both staff and management. To move from codified rules contained within a contract of employment to a situation where staff and managers evaluate workload and efficiency against the institution requirements is a logical progression from the work that had taken place on cultural change. The experience of managing staff within broad guidelines has begun to change attitudes to the measurement of workload and has helped to develop a sense of participation in the process.

The college has established the style of management without surprises and open communication which has helped staff understand why the new contract has been introduced and therefore shift the attention to the benefits and how it can be implemented.

The third element in the programme of change is the introduction of a performance management scheme. Directly related to previous efforts to develop new attitudes, the pilot phase for the scheme covers the 1993/94 academic year and involves all senior and operational management posts. The development work has involved Hay Management Consultants and the scheme is currently being documented. The staff concerned have been involved in the design of the scheme which is tailored to the college's own requirements. The main aim of the scheme is to improve the quality of the process of managing people. The key features are a structured approach to determining key accountabilities plus annual performance agreements and reviews with line managers. The process focuses not only on what an individual is expected to do, but also on how these things are achieved. The performance

related pay element gives the college an opportunity to reward excellence without undermining basic pay, and focuses attention on the process itself.

The scheme provides a mechanism by which a particular management style can be promoted and developed. The second phase of implementation will involve team leaders in management development and scheme design. Performance management has the additional advantage of improving corporate planning without undermining delegated responsibility. As advantages become apparent the initial apprehension to performance management has reduced and there is now a growing recognition that extending the scheme throughout the organisation will have numerous benefits.

END COMMENT

The future of a college in the newly created FE sector rests very much on the way managers and staff work together with a common mission and shared values. The measures taken at Broxtowe College Nottingham to stimulate and shape cultural change to achieve a desired end have at times been unpredictable in their effect. In difficult circumstances the college has however developed and grown. I am aware that for many in education a managerial culture is anathema. What we have attempted to create is far from crude managerialism. Shared college values such as placing the highest importance on students, respecting staff and participative management are firmly based in the education tradition. The culture we are still in the process of developing is essentially humanistic and rational, whilst giving the college the strongest chance of survival in a competitive environment.

It can be useful to draw a parallel between classroom management and college management. Good practice in both would seek to involve people, find out what individuals aspire to, delegate responsibility and in return allow people to solve problems their own way within organisational parameters. Management at Broxtowe College is about leadership, encouraging and helping staff, praise and reward, discovering the art of the possible and setting high standards for people to strive for. One measure of our success is the high esteem in which the college is held by organisations and individuals who come into contact with us. The attitude and self-confidence of staff makes the college responsive and noted for its ability to grasp opportunities. The staff who are in the best position to say how they feel about the management style of the college, but the last word will be with the students who chose to study here.

Chapter 8

Incorporation at City of Bath College

Justin Togher
Principal
City of Bath College

HISTORY

'There are no problems, only opportunities.'

In Spring 1991, Kenneth Clark announced that further education colleges would be transferred to incorporated status. For me, this was the opportunity I had been preparing for; the chance to make a fresh start. I had worked in the English FE system for 11 years, five as a vice-principal and six as a principal, and I knew precisely what changes I wished to make to improve the FE service. My conclusions after 11 years were that the local education authority (LEA) system had served its purpose in establishing the FE system, but that the country now required a more dynamic, accountable and responsive service, and that institutional independence was the mechanism to achieve that aim.

The other fundamental reason for change was the need to replace an outmoded system of education. If anyone starting up a business today were to describe their staff contract as one where the staff were only required to attend 30 hours when in fact needed nearer to 40 hours to do their jobs; where they were only required to attend 38 weeks in the year when more like 42 weeks were necessary, and that the difference would be made up as part of their individual 'goodwill', they would quite rightly think one were bonkers! This is, however, an accurate description of the basis of the further education system in England. Add to this a pile of agreements between the employer and the trade unions contained in the famous 'Silver Book', which have in effect 'de-professionalised' the service. The LEAs had also effectively ceded their responsibilities to the trade unions through the Silver Book, making it

possible for managers to manage in a hands-on way only if the trade union branch agreed to certain interpretations. The Silver Book had become a key which could open the door to change, or lock the door against change, at the behest of the trade union. In some colleges it had become effectively a charter which protected a minority of 'minimalisers', while at the same time failing to give recognition or credit to the many hard workers, and it was entirely the fault of the employer that this had occurred. If NATFHE (National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education) became too powerful, it was because LEAs, governing bodies, principals and managers had given it that power, in many cases willingly. Incorporation created the opportunity to correct this balance in the interests of the future of the service and the student.

The other critical fact was the history of total resistance to change by the NATFHE branch at Bath College of FE. The strategy at Bath was developed in the light of this, although the overall approach has in my opinion universal application.

The LEA also left the college with two serious problems:

- an over-generous academic grading system, which had established the staffing costs of the college at £0.5m above comparable colleges in England, placing it in the upper quartile of high cost colleges; and

- a discriminatory, anomalous and inequitable set of conditions of service which were in breach of any code of fair employment practice.

I resolved that in view of the predictable opposition of NATFHE to any change, evolutionary process was not an option, and adopted Machiavelli's advice, to make the painful, far-reaching long-term changes in one large step, all in the first year. It was also the case that the staff were expecting significant changes in the first year and it was important not to disappoint them.

INTRODUCTION

My ideas and philosophy of what constitutes a successful college have been developing throughout my career in education. My experience in each of the colleges, and countries, I have worked in has been invaluable. I have also met many other educational managers representing colleges and systems from across the world and I have listened with interest to the many views and experiences expressed. The most fundamental issue that has struck me in all those discussions

was the question of an openness in the approach of management to the operation of a college. It is this aspect that lies at the centre of my own approach and has ultimately helped to create the greatest force for change in those who have supported my proposals, and the greatest fear in those who have opposed them.

One of my earliest observations in FE was the constant complaint made by many staff that they were not properly informed of changes or given the opportunity to make suggestions or be consulted. In my eight years as a principal I have consistently published documentation on every change and held many face-to-face meetings with staff and in that time I have received only a handful of suggestions. The real issue is that there are 'none so blind as those who will not see'. The level of questions at staff meetings has generally supported the proposition that some staff simply do not read the documentation, or that their powers of comprehension are extremely poor. There is also the strange phenomenon in academics that the meaning of a statement is taken to be the exact opposite to its literal meaning, the roots of this having something to do with the conspiracy theory/syndrome in college staff rooms. The reality is that the actual level of interest of the majority of staff in matters outside their immediate span of activity is very low, reacting only if they feel this is threatened. Their reaction is invariably based on misinformation provided by close colleagues or their trade union, which they willingly accept as they are then at least united in their view, which gives them comfort. This insight was underlined by the statement of one of the NATFHE leaders, who said that they had never actually read the Silver Book until the conflict over the new contract. The eminent writer Kenneth Galbraith summed it up brilliantly in his book **The culture of contentment** (1993), which states:

> ... that individuals and communities that are favoured in their economic, social and political condition attribute social virtue and political durability to that which they themselves enjoy – even in the face of commanding evidence to the contrary.

This somewhat artificial and elitist world academics have structured for themselves was summed up admirably in the trade union representatives' initial rejection of the CEF's (Colleges' Employers' Forum) new discipline and grievance procedures as 'treating them like factory workers', the implication being that lecturers are quite content to earn their living teaching factory workers, but regard themselves as a higher order of human being, to be exempt from the rules that apply to the humble factory worker. This also explains, in part, why NATFHE feels it can refuse to participate in consultations with the employer if it does not like what it sees. It might also partly explain why NATFHE calls itself a professional association, although

it is a trade union. This has allowed its members to claim that they are not a trade union, so they do not have to operate within the discipline expected of a trade union, a case of 'having your cake and eating it'. Many principals have taken similar refuge in claiming they did not wish to use established industrial relations practices for fear of 'damaging the goodwill that managers in colleges depend on to run their colleges'. The difficulty with goodwill is that it is not contractual. I will settle for a contracted professionalism any time in place of dependence upon goodwill.

NATFHE has developed the approach that if it does not acknowledge a problem, it simply does not exist. An example of this was NATFHE's tactic of refusing to negotiate with the principal, and subsequently requesting the annual consultative meeting with the corporation to complain about the principal's proposals. When the chairman of the corporation made it clear at that meeting that the principal had the complete support of the corporation, the union side were impelled to state that 'We feel that **we** are accountable to the community'. The union side seemed stunned when the chairman pointed out that the corporation members were in fact the representatives of that community. It was abundantly clear that the union officers did not regard themselves as accountable to the corporation. This was undoubtedly one of the reasons for them clinging to the transfer of rights and the Silver Book, to retain NATFHE's position as being accountable to some higher order of their choosing, normally described as national collective bargaining. It is the establishment of a local employer that is causing such alarm in NATFHE and its pursuance of a national agreement which it can then use as a shield to protect itself in local discussions. Unfortunately, in the past there have been too many consensus-type principals who were willing to support NATFHE's approach, rather than follow established industrial relations practice and employment law, the application of which requires a certain amount of moral fortitude, something for which managers in the FE service are neither renowned, nor which would necessarily have been approved of by their governing bodies or LEAs.

It is the principal and chief executive who **must** lead change and be prepared to handle the strategic management of the problems that will arise. Successful management is also about **preparation**, and meticulous preparation gives a manager the maximum number of options in overcoming the inevitable resistance to change. There is still a naive belief amongst many senior managers in education that radical change can and should be painless. This belief is fostered by the notion that there is a 'right' way of introducing change which will automatically invite consensus, making the change painless, which is usually the change they are introducing next year.

It is interesting that when the opponents of change run out of or have no credible arguments against a proposed change, they will ultimately resort to vague phrases such as 'If only it had been introduced differently', or as in Bath 'If only the principal did not seem to be enjoying introducing the change so much' as a means of expressing their distaste for the change. The truth of the matter is that lecturers are great complainers by nature and in general they tend to see only the negative dimension of a situation as well as thinking only in the very short-term. This was demonstrated by a prominent lecturer who complained that the marketing image of the college had been destroyed as a result of a set of new high quality chairs arriving in a classroom 'with the wrapping paper still on them'. This is further demonstrated by the same member of staff who was waxing lyrical about how good the college was until the latest changes. He had forgotten that he had bitterly opposed the previous changes four years earlier when he said that we were destroying his world. He apparently got over the changes sufficiently in the meantime. There is also the momentous phrase made by another staff member at a meeting of the governing body that 'NATFHE is not against change in theory', the implication being 'only in practice'.

THE VISION AND VALUES

My vision of the basis of delivering a high quality education service to the community is rooted in an employer/employee relationship based on mutual respect and the recognition by the employer that the employee has legitimate rights and responsibilities and by the employee that the employer has legitimate rights and responsibilities.

Certain aspects of the vision and values within the proposed new incorporated institution were introduced to the college through two previous re-organisations, one in 1986 and then following the Education Reform Act in 1988. The Education Reform Act was not the success that had been anticipated. It had promised greater freedom for managers but in reality the LEA still held the key controls over conditions of service. It was abundantly clear to me that as long at NATFHE was free to interpret the Silver Book as it wished, colleges could never be managed effectively. We needed locally agreed policies, so that interpretations were capable of being resolved locally. The thrust of the new contract at Bath was:

- one new single contract for all academic staff and college services staff respectively;

- one new single pay spine for all academic staff and college services staff respectively;
- one set of discipline and grievance procedures for **all** staff;
- the establishment of local plant bargaining with the trade unions;
- the establishment of a 37 hour working week for **all** full-time staff;
- the establishment of a 42 week working year for lecturers;
- the introduction of fixed term (one, two or three years) posts of responsibility, additional to the permanent post of lecturer;
- the establishment of a professional administrative assistant role in each school;
- the concept of all specialist groups in the new structure providing services to the delivery of learning;
- a new, simpler and less top heavy organisational structure;
- greatly increased induction and staff development training and targeted funding for curriculum development;
- the elimination of **all** previous conditions of service; and
- the elimination of the much discredited senior lecturer grade post.

A new organisational structure was proposed at the same time as the implementation of the new staff contract. The new structure established each of the schools on a single line budget for all human, materials and equipment resources, including academic, administrative and technician staff. The new structure eliminated the senior lecturer grades (which were converted to 18 assistant head of school posts) and introduced over 40 new posts of responsibility.

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE

The vision and values underpinning the new contract were drafted in a consultation document, which was discussed in detail by the college executive, as a first step. It

was vital that this group of approximately 20 academic managers, whose combined experience and knowledge covered the whole range of roles and levels within FE, ultimately supported the new contract, as they would be responsible for its implementation and development. As the architect of the original proposal, I was anxious to use it as a means of developing the executive team while at the same time improving the proposal. The contribution of the executive team was considerable and following a very productive initial set of meetings the revised proposal was considered and agreed by the governors' finance and general purposes committee and then published to all the college staff and the governing body simultaneously in February 1992. The consultative document was also sent to NATFHE in preparation for formal consultations.

This initiated a period of action by NATFHE which could only be described as hysterical as they tried every known manoeuvre to have the proposal withdrawn, while as a union they refused to participate in any kind of discussion. Letters were sent to governors, the LEA, the MP, local councillors, and the academic staff member on the governing body spoke against the proposal at two governing body meetings in the presence of a significant number of staff. There were some humorous moments during this period of high drama which arose at meetings I had with each of the schools to explain and discuss the proposals. One lecturer (who taught 20 hours a week) claimed that he could never teach 23 hours a week as it would lead to a nervous breakdown. He had evidently forgotten a meeting he had with me two years before when he made a formal complaint against his head of school because he would only give him **five** hours overtime a week – he was requesting up to **ten** hours a week extra! One of a number of epic phrases coined at this time came from a member of staff who felt the increase in teaching hours could effectively 'lead to a reduction in the quality of my teaching'. The same member of staff's head of school subsequently reported that the individual used this phrase whenever there was a request to do anything other than the most routine tasks. Another comment was the union's view that the new pay offer was a 'bribe' and they 'could not be bought'. It begs the question, what was it they thought they were being paid their salary for? Was it not the buying of their skills?

All grades of lecturers, the most vociferous being the senior lecturers on 15 hours teaching per week, argued vehemently that they could not possibly teach more hours even though the statistics showed that the staff consistently undertaking the greatest amount of overtime were these same staff. Another theme that caused humour was the sudden new popularity of administrative duties, which academic staff wished to retain at all costs. The phrase 'indistinguishable from my teaching duties' was coined in this period of new commitment to tasks previously reviled.

Several academic staff also enquired as to the purpose of keeping staff at college for four extra weeks, saying 'What will we do with all this time?' When challenged with their constant complaints of insufficient time to meet colleagues for planning and development purposes, or the opportunity to engage in properly planned staff development, or the opportunity to advise prospective students prior to the new session, they would lapse into puzzled silence. In essence, the process of change was slow for the lecturing staff.

THE STRATEGY

It was abundantly clear from our knowledge of the staff that there were three broad groupings to deal with. The first included the clear thinkers, the high-fliers, the ambitious and the leaders of the future. I felt this group would jump at the opportunities presented by the changes proposed. They would also give leadership to others and assist in breaking the trade union block that would be attempted. It was also an opportunity for many of those people to identify themselves as managers of the future. The second grouping were predominantly the solid, hard working, dependable types, likely to be influenced by the union initially as that was where their loyalty normally resided. I believed that we could win over the majority of this group in time, as they were not directly opposed to change, although they would prefer to avoid it. The third group were the idealogues who generally formed the bulwark of the union, who would fight or sit out any change proposed by the principal. This group could not be changed and it was essential that the corporation prevail against them in dictating the future of the college. The proposal for change was published in February 1992, 15 months prior to incorporation, to give plenty of time for the following to take place:

- discussion with **all** staff, governors, NATFHE, LEA officers, Her Majesty's Inspectorate and other principals in Avon, so that an improved proposal could result;
- to allow staff time to absorb and adapt to the changes;
- to allow those who wished to take their leave to do so in good time and with proper preparations;
- to allow a voluntary reduction in staffing levels so that the increased productivity could be absorbed without the spectre of redundancies; and

- to give the management time to circumvent the anticipated NATFHE tactics and, in particular, to offset the inevitable criticism that NATFHE always makes about lack of consultation.

I met each group of school staff on at least three occasions in the following year, and in a number of cases double that number, and many staff visited me personally. It was clear from these discussions that the strategic issues were simply beyond the comprehension or interest of many staff, and their reaction was often pitched at a purely emotional, or personal, level. 'Why are you doing this to us?', 'Why don't you just leave us alone?' were common reactions. This attitude had been promoted by NATFHE who portrayed the change as simply a power struggle between management and staff and in particular, the right of the lecturer to sit out any change. In contrast, some lecturing staff were very supportive of the changes, recognising in particular, the financial imperative driving the corporation and security of jobs. Following preparatory consultations with the NATFHE branch in February 1993, the NATFHE officers withdrew from the discussions. Further consultations were offered to individual members of staff which were concluded by 31 March 1993. The final financial package was prepared and agreed by the corporation for release on 19 April 1993. This package was designed to attract the main group of lecturers with a three per cent increase in salary (one increment in practice) plus £200 for signing. Each lecturer, except LIIs and SLs stood to gain £850 from the change. Those who did not sign would receive no pay rise until their productivity matched that of the new lecturer post. A key pre-requisite in the implementation of the 40 new posts of responsibility was the signing of the contract.

It is paradoxical that during my discussions and explanations of the new proposals, it was clear that many young academics liked what they saw. As time progressed, our soundings revealed that the level of acceptance of the changes was quite high, although the staff were either too proud, afraid or stubborn to admit this as a group or in public. The branch was also putting up a good fight arranging regular shows of unity and persuading its members to deliver their unsigned contracts into the hands of officers, so that individuals would not be tempted. It is a pity that NATFHE could not marshal its efforts to lead change rather than oppose it, although it could be argued that this is a more usual British trait. Intimidation by some union members was clearly in evidence and I received a letter from one member of staff who was fearful of other colleagues' actions should that employee sign. NATFHE was also making bold promises of forcing the withdrawal of the new contract and protecting employees' conditions of service and salaries. It was also emerging that many lecturing staff were simply not strong enough to accept individual responsibility for the changes even though it was explained to them that signing was in effect saving

their own jobs. Hitherto change had always come from on high through some form of national agreement, yet this time they were being pressed to make the decision individually. Many appeared unable to do so. From remarks they made it was clear that some form of imposition would take away the individual responsibility for the decision, and free them to complain about it later.

In contrast, UNISON negotiated a CEF-type contract following a number of very positive meetings, for implementation in January 1994.

As time progressed, 70 per cent of the academic staff signed by October 1993. The corporation then decided that in order for the college to be financially viable in the new funding regime, be managed efficiently and effectively, and secure the jobs of existing staff, the remaining staff who had not signed should be requested to do so, or face the likelihood of dismissal.

NATFHE marshalled all its resources to resist this threat and prepared for strike action, while offering to discuss the proposed changes within the limits of the Silver Book. A strike was instituted as the deadline approached for signing and ultimately 47 staff refused to sign. The local MP, Don Foster, convened a high level meeting between Geoff Woolfe, Richard Eve and Dilys Hardacre (from NATFHE), Roger Ward and myself to clarify the positions. A fragile understanding emerged that NATFHE would recognise problems at Bath as a one-off, to be resolved locally. The following morning I contacted ACAS, inviting a series of talks which brought NATFHE to the negotiating table for the first time. The discipline and experience of ACAS led us through very positive discussions leading to significant agreement in the form of a guidelines for managers document. The branch did not accept the outcome of the ACAS talks, preferring to give the misleading impression of accepting the ACAS package while setting conditions that the package be modified to their satisfaction, plus a new request for backdated pay. It was important to bring this matter to a head quickly and a further letter was sent to those who had not signed setting a new deadline for signing or face likely dismissal. This time the NATFHE branch voted to accept the new contract, and the burden was lifted. One of the most pleasing outcomes of the branch decision was NATFHE headquarters' claim of a 'victory' for the union at Bath. The 'victory' was on offer to NATFHE at any time in the previous year if they had wanted it. It is certainly a case of a 'victory' for NATFHE over themselves in at last coming to accept the reality of their situation.

I have not the slightest doubt that previous history will repeat itself and that within a year of the implementation of the new contract the vast majority of staff will have put the conflict behind them. At the same time, it was important that they do not

forget entirely as it is intended that the changes to be permanent and irreversible. Too many changes, thought to be radical in their time, have in the past had no lasting effect due to a lack of commitment to the implementation.

PROS AND CONS

The main objectives of the change have now been achieved and the majority of staff appear undamaged by the experience. A number of staff have taken advantage of generous severance terms to take early retirement, or have moved to new jobs and a new career elsewhere. It is interesting that some academic staff have accepted inferior contracts elsewhere, rather than sign the Bath contract and face their colleagues. It cannot be denied that the transition has been painful at Bath but the contrast in approach between the two unions (NATFHE and UNISON) is stark. UNISON took a tough but positive approach to the change and in contrast to NATFHE's total resistance, college services staff made the change without major conflict.

The central reason for the overall success of our strategy was that it was meticulously planned and took account of advice from our solicitors and the CEF. It was communicated exhaustively, with commitment and patience by the whole of the corporation board, and the college executive, within an adequate time frame. We did not falter but continued to implement the strategy even when circumstances did not look favourable. We prepared for a sustained process of change and the sheer inevitability has won more and more staff over as time has moved on.

The lessons to be learnt are that change must be planned in relation to what the service needs within its legal framework and not simply to please staff. The strategic position of the college is the responsibility of the principal and corporation, not the individual, or the trade union. Preparing the corporation members and executive for the worst possible situation as a starting point was critical to the success as each progressive step was a bonus, which motivated us to greater efforts. The one aspect which surprised us all in the executive was the level of self-deception of individual union members at NATFHE meetings which seemed to convince them that they could have the new contract withdrawn. The NATFHE branch also managed to imply reduced college staffing levels from 180 to 130 to make the unsigned group of 77 at that time seem like a majority, yet claimed they could not understand how savings in staffing costs had been made. They claimed that costs had been increased by the single promotion of an individual to assistant head of school (not a favourite within the said school as the individual broke ranks) even though three senior

lecturers and two lecturers had left that particular school without replacement. The NATFHE branch had also convinced itself that its role was to continue the fight against the new contract on behalf of the whole country, although a majority of academic staff in the college had signed the new contract.

The other surprising aspect was the tactics of NATFHE in sacrificing the careers of its individual members. Having advised certain of its members not to apply for the new posts of responsibility, which were subsequently filled by other NATFHE members, they then had the gall to ask management to 'reconsider' the position. To be fair to union officers, it must be said that they are usually instructed by their members at branch meetings to implement new policies, which the ordinary member can then present as an instruction from the union. I have little doubt that those individuals who follow a union edict to their own apparent detriment usually have an ulterior motive which they hope the power of the union can deliver.

The same syndrome is apparent at a higher level in colleges where many principals have used the Colleges' Employers' Forum in a similar way, quoting CEF policy as if it were an instruction, or claiming they were waiting for the CEF to implement the new contract when the responsibility for such was theirs and theirs alone.

At the root of the change of culture is the replacement of an apparently benign social service employer by a new market-led employer. This change has revealed a deep problem common among those FE staff who entered the service primarily because of its security, long holidays and benign employer. It is understandable that these people, who exist at all levels in colleges, will find the new education market culture much less attractive, even frightening, and this is part of their reason for resisting change. Among that group there will be those who cannot reconcile themselves to this change as it strikes at the very core of their personality and they are simply unsuited to the new culture. Some of these staff have already recognised this and have left, others should do likewise, before it destroys them.

The most satisfying aspect of the whole implementation has been the emergence of a very strong management team which has gained the experience of a successful team approach. This team of 15 senior, 25 middle managers and a further 40 junior managers represents a group of 80 committed staff who have been welded together by a unique common purpose and experience from which they and the college have gained. The success of the implementation of incorporation will be their success and it will be through them that the aims of the college will be achieved.

OUTCOMES

Where are we now? We are nearing the end of the beginning. This will be my third beginning at Bath and certainly the best yet. There is no end, no middle, just new beginnings that lead to the next new beginning. The test of a good organisation is its capacity to introduce change. When I arrived at Bath eight years ago the normal reaction to a new initiative was to ask 'Why, we are doing all right the way we are'. There would then be a range of reasons put as to why we could or should not do it and ultimately, if pressed, it simply would not be done. The new executive, which has only one remaining member from eight years ago, talks about how, and when, initiatives will be taken, and who will do it. Nothing is impossible, only possibly delayed, but deadlines are set to be beaten, not stretched or ignored as before. We are alive and raring to go.

What are the characteristics of the new college culture? It is about being friendly but highly professional; being a team member, and what you can do for others; realising the college mission; being ashamed of anyone who does not give 100 per cent effort at all times, and saying so; giving and taking criticism; accepting the fallibilities of those failing to go forward; and about recognising that you have the most interesting, most important, most difficult, but most satisfying job in society. From these aspirations a culture emerges which anyone who enters your organisation can see the evidence of in everyone's attitude and actions. This culture is established at the top and it should radiate down through the whole organisation. It requires constant attention, and is epitomised in a total quality management approach. To achieve this in the longer term the most important process is undoubtedly the choosing of staff with the most positive characteristics, backed by a comprehensive strategy that initiates and monitors the organisational dynamics. Ultimately it is simply a combination of a very positive attitude and the application of the highest level of personal and technical skills. High performers inspire, and inspiration is the essence of good learning, good leadership and good management. If you are not inspired in this job, you are a liability to yourself and everyone else in the organisation.

Finally, I will finish where I started, by saying that incorporation was not a problem for me, but the greatest opportunity in my lifetime to build and lead a team which can ultimately create a further education college of which its community will be truly proud.

REFERENCE

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